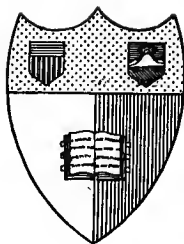


MERRY ANDREW



F. RONEY WEIR



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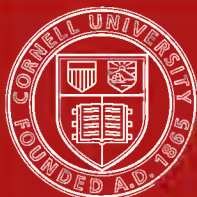
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BY
F. RONEY WEIR

ILLUSTRATED BY
RALPH G. HEARD



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MERRY ANDREW

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CHAPTER I

"The McNabs have beaten us again," grumbled Merry Andrew. "They have finished both fields, while we shall have to hustle to get our first one done tonight."

Her grandfather gathered a handful of rustling stalks, hacked them off at the bottom and carried them to his "stook."

"Yes," he admitted patiently, "the McNabs always beat us."

"Now why?" demanded Merry Andrew. She jabbed her corn-cutter into the earth, drew off her gloves and hat and threw them in a heap on the ground. Bartholomew Vonvolkenberg, the hired man, leaned against the stook he had just built and laughed raucously.

"Yeh ain't a goin' to quit, are yeh, because McNab's folks beat us?"

"Not exactly," replied Merry Andrew; "I'm going to put up my hair."

It was dark hair with a loose kink, and so heavy as

to defy the crookedest of pins. Her hands showed white against the mass of it as she gathered and pinned it into a compact knot at the nape of her neck. Grandfather straightened up with an effort and gazed out across his neighbor's field.

"McNab's folks have machines for everything," he said.

"Well," accused Merry Andrew, "that's the best way, isn't it — with machines? You can do things so much quicker and so much better."

"Oh, yes, it's the best way," conceded Grandfather, hacking another clutch of stalks, "if you've got the machinery."

"Haw, haw, haw! See where your hat's a goin'!" called out Bartholomew Vonvolkenberg triumphantly, and Merry Andrew turned to catch a glimpse of her wildly waving head-piece borne away in the jaws of Boy, the most aggressive of her collie pups, while Two-boy, Boy's brother, raced madly after in an effort to be in at the demolition.

A moment before Merry Andrew had believed herself tired to the dropping-point, but at sight of the raid, all the untiring element of inconsequential youth which had actuated the collies in the perpetration of the theft, spurred their mistress to the pursuit. Away she went, leaping the corn stubble and calling to the dogs in a laughter-choked voice.

Boy cast a roguish glance at his pursuer, then paused

to detach a souvenir from the hat rim. Twoboy arrived, and was disputing possession with his brother when the owner pounced upon them and recovered her property.

"You've got a nice looking hat now," commented Grandfather, trying to be severe but grinning in spite of himself at Merry Andrew's chewed appearance.

"If I owned them there dogs, I'd shoot 'em!" declared Bartholomew in solemn disgust.

"Calm yourself, Bartholomew," returned Merry Andrew, "you don't own 'em; I own 'em."

"But you won't own 'em long. I heard old McNab tellin' your gran'mother he'd be willin' to pay a little suthin' for one of them pups — the best one."

"What's that?" cried out Merry Andrew so wrathfully that Bartholomew flinched. She looked a bit dangerous with her eyes flashing from under her damaged hat and her corn-saber gleaming in the air. Bartholomew had never heard of Semiramis or of Joan of Arc, or he might have been even more concerned.

"There goes your gloves," he announced by way of diversion. Merry Andrew was off again.

The recovery was more complicated this time as each pup had taken a glove; Twoboy escaping in the direction of home, Boy heading for the road which lay to the west of the field. Merry Andrew returned at last, puffing, gurgling with laughter, and far behind with her work. Her four rows stood out lonesomely,

Grandfather and Bartholomew having finished theirs at the road fence and begun on new ones leading towards the east and home. The dogs fairly radiated satisfaction. They kept near Merry Andrew in hopes of another frolic, but their mistress was through with fooling. She hacked and hauled and bound the stalks rapidly. She was already gaining on the men. She, too, reached the fence at last and turned to new rows. If Bartholomew had been alone she might easily have overtaken him. Almost any one could overtake Bartholomew in his work. But Grandfather hacked along steadily and set the pace, his back bent in a tired, patient way.

Grandfather's hobby was United States history; a taste he had scant leisure to indulge, because by the time his day's work was over he was too tired to keep awake through the "Critical Period," or to follow the mazes of the Missouri Compromise. Often Merry Andrew, or her sister, Sylvia, or her mother, "the Widder Drew," as the neighbors called her, read aloud to Grandfather until his gray head began to sag towards one shoulder or the other and Grandmother commanded a general retirement. Sometimes this command was issued during the Battle of Bull Run or Stone River, when no one was sleepy; but it had to be obeyed none the less.

There is no other place in the world where one may follow out a train of thought so well as while cutting

corn alone. Merry Andrew's reflections covered the entire field of her experience; ranged from frivolous to serious, from comedy to tragedy: Why was her sister Sylvia's disposition, like her hair, pure gold, while her own inheritance had been Grandmother Drew's dark hair, homely name, and marked tendency to domineer? Merry Andrew did not fancy being like Grandmother; she much preferred to be like Mother, red-haired and conciliatory, loved and imposed upon by everybody. But her locks were inky, and everybody said she was "Grandmother's girl," everybody but Grandmother. Grandmother was arrogant, overbearing and stubborn—oh, dreadfully stubborn. When Grandmother decided that a thing was right, no persuasion could turn her. Sylvia and Mother and Grandfather "side-stepped" for Grandmother—everybody except Merry Andrew herself. Of course this went to prove the fact of their resemblance to each other.

Because of this situation there had been ructions in the Drew family and was likely to be again. Grandmother "couldn't see a joke with a spyglass"—Merry Andrew was quite sure she was ahead of Grandmother there; that, at least, she had inherited, from either Mother or Grandfather, a sense of humor—they both had it. And Grandmother's servile admiration for the McNabs—Merry Andrew was glad she had not inherited that. Grandmother admired and

bowed down to the McNabs. Why? Because the McNabs were rich. And why were the McNabs rich? Why did the McNab corn stand head and shoulders above the Drew corn? Why did McNab have machinery to do his farm work with, while the Drews cut and mowed and stacked by hand and acquired a mortgage which grew more troublesome every year? One could not solve these problems even in a twenty-acre cornfield, especially on a bleak day like this when one had to keep moving.

Yesterday the work in the field had been pleasanter. Then the air had been soft, the sunlight warm despite the time of year; the drying sunflower stalks along the run had whispered pleasantly, and silvery webs had undulated in a gentle silence. To-day all was changed. The weather had turned sour; there were heavy gray clouds gathering, and a cool wind which chilled one through if one stopped work for a moment. Bartholomew would certainly feel it, Merry Andrew reflected.

Bartholomew had ceased cutting corn and was gazing back toward the road in the well-known attitude of the peasant girl in the picture called "The Song of the Lark"; eyes fixed, lips apart in sheer abstraction — motionless, charmed. Merry Andrew turned to see what had petrified him. It was a motor car driven at top speed from the direction of McNab's toward the north and south road which skirted the Drew cornfield on the west. It looked like the McNab car, but

of course it could not be, because Wully McNab Senior never drove the car, and Wully Junior was away at school.

And there was another exasperating thought! Why could Wully McNab — who didn't care to — go to college, while poor Sylvia and Mary Ann Drew were obliged to put up with Mother's teaching at home? Not that she minded so much for herself; Mother was an excellent teacher and well fitted for the task; but Sylvia, who was musical, was fated to do housework and teach the one-two-three's to a few country children, while Gene McNab finished her musical training in Boston and New York!

Well, there was something to be thankful for, and that was that the dogs had not been in the road when the car swept along; they might have been run down, the great clumsy, careless, ignorant things!

Merry Andrew hacked away swiftly, gaining on Bartholomew who had not as yet come out of his trance.

"They're a goin' to our place," he announced, and all three of the corn-cutters paused to gaze as the car snapped into view a moment at the back door of the Drew farmhouse and then whirled to the road again and out of sight over the hill in the direction of Bendon.

"Wonder what old McNab wanted at the house?" mused Bartholomew, and Merry Andrew shuddered.

McNab held the mortgage on the Drew farm. Suppose he wanted the money? And suppose Grandfather couldn't raise it — which, of course, he couldn't — and suppose old McNab should take over the farm, with the dear, bleak, lonesome old stone house, and put an Austrian or a^a Polack tenant into it, and the Drews be obliged to go somewhere else to live — in a horrid homely house, an upright and a wing like Pudney's, for instance?

Oh, this poverty! This giving of mortgages and paying of interest! Not knowing whether you owned your place, or whether old McNab owned it!

"What do you suppose old McNab wanted?" persisted Bartholomew relentlessly.

"That wasn't Mr. McNab," said Merry Andrew; "he never drives the car — anyhow, not like that."

"It was his car."

"No, it was somebody out from Bendon after apples, or pumpkins, or whatever."

"I tell you that was McNab's car."

"Well, let it, then!" snapped Merry Andrew. "Who cares! Come on, Bartholomew, let's catch up with Grandfather."

Thus urged, Bartholomew began again to hack valorously, and so much advantage has youth, that by the time the eastern edge of the field was won, the three were once more hacking in a line. Here Bartholomew went home to the milking, while Merry An-

drew and Grandfather tackled the eight remaining rows.

"If we make an extra sprint we can finish tonight," triumphed Grandfather. "And it will be a good job if we can. It's been thickening for rain all day and we'll get it tomorrow, I'm thinking."

"You don't suppose that was old McNab after all, come about the mortgage, do you, Grandfather?" ventured Merry Andrew.

"No, that wasn't McNab; he never drives like that."

Merry Andrew was reassured, but not wholly.

"But he will come some day, won't he?"

"I suppose he will," Grandfather sighed.

"Grandfather," burst forth Merry Andrew, "I don't see how you stand it!"

"You'll find out if you live long enough that the things you have to stand you do manage to stand somehow or other," responded Grandfather gloomily.

"But how did it happen that McNab got the mortgage on your place instead of your having the mortgage on his?"

"Oh, I don't know." Grandfather was making a pitiful effort to throw off the burden of the mortgage, at least until those four rustling rows of corn were stooked; then, while he rested in the evening, he could, as usual, take it up again, turning it over and over in his tired brain. But Merry Andrew would not let the matter rest. She longed to shift the load from that

bent old back to her own young shoulders and she could not do so without a better understanding of the situation. Before it had always been, "You are too young to talk of such matters!" but now that so much of the heavy work of the farm was, naturally and inevitably, coming to her, as such work will come to the one strong enough to carry it, she felt that she had a right to know.

"McNab is a better farmer than you are, isn't he, Grandfather?"

"I suppose he is."

"Well, don't you think when a man starts in to be something he ought to learn to be the very best in the bunch?"

"I never did put much stock in book farming," Grandfather replied with some irritation. "And I've had bad luck. Your father married pretty young and there were a good many extra expenses; and then he died and left his wife and children —"

"I suppose if Sylvia and I had been boys things would have evened up better, wouldn't they?"

"I suppose they would."

"But don't you think, Grandfather, that McNab has had bad luck, too? For instance, he's had Wully — a boy who won't stay put anywhere. Do you know, I think it must be awful bad luck for a man to have a son like Wully McNab. Wully's never done

a turn on the farm, and look how Mother and Sylvia and I have worked, and still we are behind."

"Yes, yes," owned Grandfather soothingly, "you've been good girls — all of you."

"We have all worked as hard as we were able and still we are away behind," reiterated Merry Andrew savagely. "There must be a reason for it, and I am going to find out what it is! Everybody has a hobby — a dream — something they think about more than anything else; don't you realize that, Grandfather?"

"Oh, I don't know," said Grandfather.

"Well, they do. Take Grandmother, for instance: she is a great housekeeper and if you or I should ask her right out, she would tell a whopper —"

"Merry Andrew!"

"Oh, yes, I know; but we are out here in the corn-field alone together, Grandfather, and nobody hears us — she would tell us that her mind is always on her work. But it is not. It is on Mrs. McNab, and new patterns for calico bedquilts; those are her hobbies. I'll bet if you were to take an axe and split Grandmother's head right down through the middle, you'd find Mrs. McNab sitting in one half and the 'star of Texas' or 'the bridal wreath' bedquilt in the other."

Grandfather tried to suppress a wicked chuckle.

"Mother's hobby is that old church that McNab takes over for his own next month. Sylvia's is music;

Bartholomew's is automobiles, and what he eats; Boy's, Twoboy's, and Wully McNab's are alike — mischief — destruction — tearing down what other folks have worked hard to build up." Merry Andrew instinctively fingered the jagged rim of her hat.

"What's yours?" demanded Grandfather.

"Heretofore I guess I belonged in the mischief-making class with the dogs and Wully McNab; but from this on, my thoughts by day and my dreams by night shall be about just one thing — mortgage! That is to be my hobby — to save this farm from old Wully McNab!"

Grandfather's laughter provoked Merry Andrew.

"Don't you believe it?" she challenged.

"Um-hum. It may be your hobby for a year or so; then it will be something else — some young chap you'll be after to marry; Wully McNab himself, like as not —"

"Why, Grandfather Drew!" cried Merry Andrew sharply, now thoroughly aroused. "I was never so mad at you before in my life!"

"Well, well," soothed Grandfather, "you can't help it; it's the way with young women, and I wouldn't want you to be different from the rest."

"But — Wully McNab! and I despise him! You don't know how I despise him! Trifling, whiffing, no-account —" she struggled for words to clothe her indignation, and at that moment the wind, with a

gleeful whirl, spattered the darkling landscape with slanting lines of rain. Grandfather hastily tied up the last stook.

"Just in time!" he triumphed, adding in a sudden boyish zest of achievement. "Night and storm are upon us, and we must run for it or we shall be wet through before we can make home!"

With a rush like that of a bullet an automobile flashed by on the road. The driver swung a hand at the two dim figures in the field as his car sped past.

"Bartholomew was right after all," owned Merry Andrew, gazing after the car where it turned west toward McNab's. "That was McNab's car and that's young Wully, home again, as sure as you are born! Grandfather, don't imagine you've caught all the bad luck which has been sprinkled over this neighborhood. Old Wully McNab caught some of it, too. It will just mad him clean down to his old brogans if Wully has been turned out of school again!"

"I suppose it will," admitted Grandfather. "But clipper, Merry Andrew, or you'll be wet to the hide and get the rheumatism and can't raise that mortgage."

"Oh, you may laugh," warned Merry Andrew, panting at his side through the storm. "You haven't done it, but I will!"

In the excitement of beating the storm the girl threw off her fatigue like a garment. Not so Grandfather; his breath came laboriously, his pace slack-

ened. Merry Andrew caught him by the elbow and gave an added impetus to his gait. The collies circled and wheeled and cavorted, loth to have the chase end. They were in their element. Then the house door flew open, emitting a cheerful blaze of light and a supper odor, while Sylvia called out, "Hurry, or you'll be soaked!"

"Oh," gasped Merry Andrew, still dragging Grandfather, "glad you reminded us. Grandfather and I were just strolling along absent-mindedly, as you notice. Is it going to rain, do you think, really?"

The dripping collies plunged into the living-room, but immediately plunged out again, driven by the still more bitter wind of Grandmother's tongue and broom.

"We are going to have company," announced Sylvia, helping her relatives out of their wet coats. "Mrs. McNab is coming over tomorrow to spend the afternoon and stay to tea. Who do you think told us?"

"Why, Wully McNab."

"Yes, he's home again. Had a fuss with the president, and so on. Have you seen him?"

"At a distance. When Wully McNab is in a machine you don't have to be close up to recognize him," declared Merry Andrew loftily. "You can tell him as far as you can see the car. I only hope he gets jailed for speeding some day; it would serve him right!"

CHAPTER II

The day that Mrs. McNab came to visit the Drews was one of the worst of the fall. The wind blew steadily, and the rain weltered against the east parlor window with wintry insistence. Sylvia Drew paused, with her arms full of kindling-wood, to gaze out at the sodden desolation of the dooryard; the naked lilac-bush, the tool-house afloat there to the east — (the parlor side of the house, where it had no business to be) the dead grass, long, unkempt, wiped here and there like the careless yet effective brush strokes of a skilful painter; the forsaken road, winding to Bendon eight miles distant. She had come in to build the fire in the seldom-used parlor stove. The fact of a fire in the parlor marked the importance of the occasion. When any of the common neighbors came to see the Drews they were entertained in the big living-room; but when Mrs. McNab came the visiting took place in the ugly little northeast parlor with its white walls, blue-white Nottingham lace curtains, vivid Brussels carpet, and haircloth furniture.

The room was an expression of Grandmother Drew's taste. Grandmother had not given in to the younger generation in the matter of furnishing, as had

Mrs. McNab. Mrs. McNab's house was old-fashioned, too, upon the outside, but her son and daughter had gone out into the world and brought back a breath of it with them when they came from school. It had wrung Mr. McNab's heart (he being of Scotch descent and "thrufty") when his daughter, Gene, had demanded hardwood floors, a conservatory to the south of the living-room; but he had, nevertheless, yielded.

His son, "young Wully," did not inherit the family thrift. Wully's extravagance had added many a gray hair to his father's tawny thatch.

Sylvia built the fire, then stood a moment gazing about the room, trying to see it with Gene McNab's eyes. Mrs. McNab might not sense its ugliness; but if ever Gene should happen to set foot upon that beplattered carpet, she would see — oh, she would see it all! But it could not be helped; Grandfather was not well-to-do like Mr. McNab.

To Sylvia's mind the redeeming feature of the parlor was the piano. Her mother had brought it as her only dower when she came, a bride, with soul athrill to the melody of life, to live in that lonely farmhouse. The piano and her two little daughters had been the bright spots in an unusually drab existence. She had been a music teacher in Bendon until Allan Drew married her and brought her to live with his mother, to whom a clean hearth and well-filled larder spelt the

whole of a normal woman's ambition. Her given name was Felice, but the elder Mrs. Drew never spoke it. She called her "daughter-in-law."

When the first baby came Allan Drew had listened to his romantic little wife's whisper and had named it Sylvia; but when Sylvia's little sister was born he had been a month in his grave, and Grandmother named the baby after herself — Mary Ann. Flippant, high-sounding, or romantic names, Grandmother said, were apt to influence the bearers of them. And how was Grandmother to know that the baby's lisping assertion that she was "*Merry-Ann-Drew*," was to fasten upon her a title quite befitting a young person of her volatile temperament.

Sylvia slid upon the music-stool and let her fingers wander over the chilling keys. The very touch of them sent little thrills of rapture along her nerves. She only hoped the sound of her playing would not reach her grandmother's ears; to sit playing the piano when Mrs. McNab was expected would, at least, be accounted a misdemeanor. Presently the door flew open and Mother's intense little face, under its crown of red hair, appeared, all furred over with anxious wrinkles.

"Hush!" she warned, "don't play! The sound of the piano just now would make Grandmother sick! We're in awful trouble!"

"What *is* the matter?" demanded Sylvia anxiously.

"It's Merry Andrew and the boys again! They've eaten the pie — that is, Boy has —"

"The pie!" cried Sylvia, with tragedy in her voice.

"Yes, the blackberry pie! Grandmother set it on top of the pump to cool; the dogs knocked it off and Boy has eaten it."

"How do you know it was Boy?"

Mother ran across the room and tapped on the window-pane. Sylvia followed and gazed out at Merry Andrew, who turned a vivid face in their direction; a beautiful face, framed in dusky hair and torn straw hat, yet a face blazing with wrath and vindictiveness. On either side she dragged a reluctant collie. Two-boy walked in innocence, while Boy, ensanguined with blackberry juice, slunk guiltily at his mistress' side.

"Can you tell who ate the pie?" asked Mother.

At sight of her mother and sister at the window Merry Andrew began to laugh, wagging a reckless head as she proceeded to jail her friends in the tool-house — their regular place of punishment.

"They are both mad," sighed Mother.

"The dogs?"

"Oh, no; Grandmother and Merry Andrew."

"It seems as if Grandmother is always mad at Merry Andrew," sighed Sylvia, "and what is the use!"

"Merry Andrew should remember what Grandmother has done for her — for us all."

"And Grandmother should remember that Merry Andrew is still somewhat of a child, and that she loves her dogs!"

"Grandmother says that she is going to get rid of them both. Mr. McNab wants Twoboy, you know, and she is going to tell Mrs. McNab today that he may have the dog."

Sylvia was startled. "She wouldn't be that — that heartless, would she, Mother? What does Grandfather say?"

"Oh, Grandfather will do as Grandmother thinks best; you know that."

"But we ought to have some rights, Mother; at least, you ought. And, after all, we girls are their grandchildren, and, since we have grown up, we have tried to earn our way. Grandfather says he should have to hire another hand if it weren't for Merry Andrew. And every farmer needs a dog."

"But not two, dear — not two, especially if Grandmother objects. Come now, we mustn't stay here in the parlor when everything is askew in the kitchen. I think you had better stir up a minute pudding for dessert to take the place of the pie. And — wait a minute, Sylvia; Grandmother wants me to warn you girls not to mention the matter of the church before Mrs. McNab. It is an unpleasant subject to her. It seems

that she objects to Mr. McNab taking over the church, and went to town to try to persuade her minister to come out and preach in it — just to hold it. One divine service held within its doors before the end of the month would invalidate Mr. MacNab's claim to the property for another ten years. But the minister refused to come."

"He must be a hard-hearted minister."

"Apparently Mr. McNab had already laid his side of the case before the minister."

"I can't imagine what argument Mr. McNab could put forth except that he is so grasping that he wants to take advantage of the clause in his father's will which gave him the church, and the land it stands on, if it wasn't used for church purposes. That is the way of it, isn't it?"

"Yes, if the church isn't opened for religious services for the space of ten consecutive years it reverts to the McNabs."

"Mr. McNab has money with which to buy lumber for his barns and pigsties — that's all the church would amount to torn down — and he has more land now than he knows what to do with — Mother, do you think it is right of Mr. McNab to tear down the poor old church just because the law gives him the chance?"

"No! oh, no! The poor little church, where I played the organ when I was first married! In that little short time when — I was happy!" She fum-

bled for her handkerchief, and not finding it, caught up the corner of her big apron with which to stifle a sob.

It cut Sylvia to the heart to see her mother weep. It was not often in all her hard and sordid life that Mrs. Drew gave way to tears before her girls.

"Mother," said Sylvia suddenly, "when Mrs. McNab's own minister refused to come, why didn't she try the other one — Mr. Clyde?"

"Oh, Mrs. McNab would never do that; she would think it almost a sacrilege to invite a minister not of her own denomination to preach in the church built by Mr. McNab's father."

"Well, I wouldn't," said Sylvia. "We certainly need a church, and church services. We are getting to be perfect heathen; all of us."

The door opened suddenly and Grandmother's uncompromising countenance confronted the culprits. They both started guiltily.

"What is the matter?" demanded Grandmother icily.

"We — we — were just talking," faltered Mother.

"Well!" breathed Grandmother, with the expulsion of breath which with her meant high displeasure, "a strange time for visiting! She will be here now at any minute, and the table not set, and neither one of you with your dress changed. Seems very strange to me!"

Grandmother was in the habit of describing herself as a "frail old woman," but no one gazing upon her stalwart figure, her abundant, iron-gray hair, her youthful alertness of gesture and sprightliness of step, could doubt that she had still many years of usefulness and administrative dominance before her, or that she stood a chance of outliving her sensitive, repressed little daughter-in-law.

"I don't know what is to become of that girl!" Grandmother's tones were weighted with despair. Sylvia and her mother stood distressfully gazing at the central platter-shaped figure in the carpet. They seldom argued with Grandmother, especially when the text of Grandmother's discourse was Merry Andrew.

"A self-willed, stubborn child, with no respect whatever for her elders, and fast growing into a domineering woman," went on Grandmother. "She has needed discipline — correction; she has had neither!" She paused. Mother's face was flushed. Sylvia's gaze was still riveted upon the platter.

"We — have thought —" faltered Mother, "that Merry Andrew — I mean Mary Ann — was like — you."

"Me! Me!" breathed Grandmother in horror.

"I mean," Mother hastened to add, "I had hoped that her youthful wilfulness would turn into — into strength of character —"

"In my youth I was never flippant!" announced Grandmother severely, "Never!"

"Has Merry Andrew — Mary Ann — been flippant?" sighed Mother.

"She has. When she saw the dog, with his muzzle covered with pie-juice, she laughed!" Sylvia stirred uneasily, then suddenly produced her handkerchief and coughed into it. "Now what was there to laugh at in such a spectacle?" demanded Grandmother. "I struck the dog, and when he yelped, she called out, 'You rang the bell that time, Grandmother.' What did she mean by that? And when I ordered her to catch the dog and bring him to me so that I could punish him as he deserved, she shook her head saucily and refused. Said she couldn't; that she considered that he had been punished enough; that whipping ruined a collie. Now what is to be done with her?"

As Merry Andrew's relatives seemed to have nothing to suggest, Grandmother issued her ultimatum:

"One thing is certain, the dogs must go! I will not have them about the place any longer!"

Despite the episode of the pie, Grandmother was entirely ready to receive Mrs. McNab when that lady arrived a few moments later. She wore her second-best black dress — her visiting dress — finished at the neck with a crocheted collar and a lavender bow with fringed ends. She had even tied on her large, light

calico apron, the last rite before the advent of company. It was well, for with a suddenness which fairly took away the breath, a motor car whirled between the parlor window and the tool-house, and young Wully McNab jumped out and lifted his fear-stricken mother to the ground. The ready and the unready went forth into the rain together to greet the guest, while from the tool-house came Merry Andrew — the most unready of all — in her dirty dress and ragged hat. Recklessly unready, for Boy had left the trail of his affectionate caresses upon her face and waist in smears of dark pie-juice, and in this condition she met the scandalized eyes of her Grandmother across the McNab motor.

“Hello, kid!” sang out young Wully McNab.

“Are you home?” returned Merry Andrew, rather sullenly.

“No — oh, no; I’m in the Rocky Mountains on a hunting expedition.”

“But why aren’t you at school?”

“Canned!”

“He is at home because he is a naughty boy!” explained his mother unhappily. She spoke with that haunting accent which never wholly leaves the Scotch unto the third and fourth generation — that roll of r’s and pinch of vowels. She was a round little woman with white hair and an importance bred of much pros-

perity. "He was up to his tricks on Hallowe'en, and a Professor Bailey, who has, I am sure, taken too much authority to himself, suspended Wully. Mr. McNab will look into the matter." Young Wully winked broadly at Merry Andrew.

"Come in, come in, Mrs. McNab," urged Grandmother; "your bonnet will be ruined."

"It doesn't matter," returned Mrs. McNab, in a tone which conveyed the impression that there were plenty more bonnets where that came from.

"I wanted to come home anyhow," declared young Wully; "I wanted to use the machine. Father doesn't dare run it, and mother is like a raving maniac when one goes faster than three miles an hour. Jump in, girls," he invited, as Mother and Grandmother led their guest within, "I'll take you for a little spin."

"Thank you," said Sylvia, "but I would rather go in and visit. Besides, I must make a pudding for supper."

"Come on then, you, kid."

"I'm desperate, but not enough so to want to commit suicide yet awhile, Mr. Wully McNab," retorted Merry Andrew; "and I do wish you would try to remember that my parents were not goats! And there is something else I want to speak about, now that I have the chance: Grandmother is threatening to give one of my dogs to your folks. But I won't have it!

If you dare — you or your father — to take my dog, I'll — I'll burn your barns, and shoot your cattle, and — and puncture your tires!"

Young Wully howled with delight.

"You bet I'll take your dog if Grandmother Drew gives him to me. I want a fightin' dog. A dog should be taught to earn his keep."

"So should a boy. But they aren't — always. I could mention some that are perfectly whiffling, no-account —"

"Merry Andrew!" expostulated Sylvia, "what are you saying!"

"Don't stop her," pleaded Wully, "I agree with every word she says. That big George Stone, for instance; lazy as a dormouse, and Pete Swanson not two jumps behind. It's a fright the way those guys carry sail! If I were their fathers — or — I should say, if I was his father — or its father — or its fathers, — or — Oh, dear me! I'm all mixed up in my grammar and me just from college, too! Which is correct, Sylvia? I won't ask the kid there; she doesn't know grammar from a saw-horse. Say, is that the voice of the dog Grandmother Drew is going to give us McNabs? Where is he, tied up in the shed yonder? It's a raucous voice, isn't it? Is he really good for anything, kid?"

"He has never been turned out of school," taunted Merry Andrew.

"Why is he tied up?"

"He stole a pie."

"Is that straight? What a coincidence! That's what I was canned for — stealing a pie, and eating it — with other things, in the dormitory." Then he jumped into his car, made a grand circle over the grass, but drew up again to inquire, "That voice sounds double; are there two of him? Or should I have said, is there two of him? Which is right, Sylvia? Dear me, I do try so hard to be correct — just having finished school this way."

"Finish school!" sneered Merry Andrew. "You'll never finish anything, Wully McNab. I haven't any patience with you! It would do you good to get a few hard knocks — to have to earn what you put in your mouth and the clothes you put on your back. That might make a man of you! Sylvia and I would give all our old shoes to have the chance for the education which you are throwing away!"

"Instead of going to school you have to stay and earn your bread and butter?"

"Yes, we do."

"And still it hasn't made men of you. Theory all wrong, you see." Then he swept away in a gale of laughter.

"Come, come, Merry Andrew," soothed Sylvia, "let's go in and get cleaned up for supper."

"I will not!" stormed her sister. "I wouldn't dare

sit down to supper with Grandmother and Mrs. McNab feeling the way I do. I should say awful things — just awful! And I warn you right here, Sylvia Drew, and I shall warn Grandfather and Grandmother and Mother, if Wully, or old McNab takes one of my dogs, I'll steal him back again and go where none of you will ever see me again!"

"You think more of your dogs than you do of Mother — poor little Mother, who would break her heart if you were to run away?"

"You know better, Sylvia; but you know that I love my dogs. I saved 'em from Al Pierce when he had 'em at the very pond to drown 'em, and I'll save 'em again in spite of the stingiest McNab that ever drew breath!"

"I don't think young Wully meant what he said about teaching the dog to fight."

"It makes no difference whether Wully meant what he said or not; I meant what I said!" Merry Andrew stalked to the house, leaving her sister thinking of the prophetic straightening of the lines about her sister's pretty mouth which made her resemble her grandmother. Was it possible that some day Merry Andrew would be what Grandmother was today, stern, hard, irresponsible to other people's wishes? And was it possible that in Grandmother's youth, she had been sweet and loving, gay and reckless? Surely time and environment were terrible mills to grind such grists!

Perhaps there had been a day when old Wully McNab had been generous — away back when his father, the original Wully, was dictating that ridiculous will. Perhaps if he had been reared amid different surroundings, where the dollar had not been worshipped so openly, and where life had been less sordid, he might not now be the wealthiest man in Rosedale Township — nor the stingiest.

It was Mrs. McNab, herself, who broached the subject of the church at the supper table. She said very decidedly that she did not approve of Mr. McNab's tearing down, or moving, the church, and was sorry that the Reverend Mr. Stroub's health would not permit his taking extra duties upon himself, such as driving eight miles into the country to preach in an empty church.

"It is too much to ask of any minister," acquiesced Grandmother.

"Yet ministers have been known to do even harder tasks for the sake of religion." Sylvia was startled at the sound of her own voice. She knew that young folks should be seen and not heard.

"Right you are, dear," said Mrs. McNab, "but I guess that day is past and gone."

"I am wondering if the other Bendon minister couldn't be persuaded to come —"

"Sylvia!" interrupted Grandmother with her severest expression, "bring in the pudding!"

"Where is Mary Ann?" inquired Mrs. McNab politely as Sylvia reappeared with the pudding.

"She is in disgrace on account of her dogs," answered Sylvia. "They have been bad, and to punish them, and Merry Andrew, Grandmother threatened to give one of them to your folks. Of course Grandmother was joking; she knows it would break Merry Andrew's heart to take her dogs away."

If Sylvia had heaved the tray of pudding straight at Grandmother's head it would not have created more of a sensation. Mother fairly shriveled in her chair; Grandfather shuffled his feet, and gazed apprehensively at his wife. Even Bartholomew Vonvolkenberg, stupid as he was, awoke to the realization of the unusual. Grandmother was the first to recover.

"No," she announced, "I was not joking; the dogs must go. And if Mr. McNab would still like one he may take his pick. We are going to get rid of them both."

Sylvia's eyes met those of Mrs. McNab. There was in them a straight appeal for help; an appeal which was not disregarded.

"Tut, tut!" said Mrs. McNab in her slightly overbearing way, "let the child keep her dogs, Mrs. Drew, if she finds any comfort in them. Let her keep them. Mr. McNab shall not take either one of them. I may not have authority enough in my own house to prevent

the confiscation of a church, but I think I may have my say in the matter of a dog or no dog."

There was a distant restraint over the remainder of the meal, but afterwards Mrs. McNab went deeply into the subject nearest Grandmother's heart — the piecing of bedquilts. She expressed an ardent desire to see again the two Grandmother had finished during the past winter, and while Grandmother went to fetch them, she gave Sylvia's arm a mischievous little shake. "You tell Mary Ann I think I've helped her out with her dogs," she chuckled. "And in the matter of the church, if you can scare up a minister — any kind of a minister, I shall be heartily glad of it!"

CHAPTER III

Sylvia dreaded the settling with Grandmother which she felt must come after her open rebellion. Grandmother was not cruel. She loved her son's children and their mother, but she had lived so long in undisputed authority that the increasing frequency of Merry Andrew's spells of insubordination had menaced the family peace for some time. Never before had Sylvia in word or manner run athwart the bows of Grandmother's ship of authority. Now that she had done so she feared a battle. She had been surprised that it had not occurred immediately upon Mrs. McNab's departure. Evidently Grandmother had decided to wait until the next morning when she would be alone with the culprits and their mother.

If such was the case her plan had been thwarted by Grandfather, who, with Bartholomew, was building a fence on the south line. They had run short of nails; at least there would not be enough to last out the day. If Grandmother could spare the girls he would like them to drive to town with the lumber wagon, get the nails, and, also, a load of lime. The men at the station would load the lime, and it would practically save him a day's work for two men, for neither he nor Bartholomew could make fence alone.

Sylvia's spirits sank. Here was the opportunity to put the strength of her resolution to the test. If anything was to be done about saving the church from Mr. McNab it must be done this week. Here was the chance to go to Bendon to seek an interview with Mr. Clyde. Brought face to face with the matter, it seemed unfair that she, a young girl, should be obliged to shoulder such a disagreeable task. She beckoned her mother to follow her upstairs when she went up to make ready for town. She hoped that Mother would decide that the matter of the church might be dropped. If Mother thought best to let it rest she could go about her work with a clear conscience. It was a very disagreeable errand, this going to coax a minister into extra work when everybody knew that ministers had more work to do than time in which to do it. And suppose she should succeed in getting a minister to drive the eight miles and preach in a shabby old white church and then nobody should be there to hear him? It would save the church, of course, but how horribly embarrassing it would be for the minister.

Mother sat on the bed soberly thinking while Sylvia combed her hair and knotted it in pretty shining coils, thrusting it through and through with big honey-colored pins which matched it exactly in shade.

"You know, Mother, ministers wouldn't be apt to pay much attention to a girl of my age —"

Merry Andrew came rushing in, shedding hat and apron as she came.

"I've had the awfulest time shutting up the boys," she scolded. "Once Grandfather let 'em out, and once Bartholomew. Dear me! do you know where my best shoes have got themselves to, Sylvia?"

"I saw them in my bedroom, dear," said Mother, and while Merry Andrew flew to the front bedroom on her search, Mrs. Drew answered: "I think any real minister, one who believes what he professes to believe, would be sympathetic if the case were presented to him, no matter who did the presenting — old man or maiden —"

"I can't find the other one." Merry Andrew thrust a round bare arm through the door to dangle one shoe in midair. Grandfather called from the lower stair door that the team was at the hitching-post.

All three began a wild search for the missing shoe. It was found under Bartholomew's bed with the top partly chewed off. Mother gazed at it in consternation. The destruction of an almost new shoe was no light matter. Merry Andrew looked sheepish.

"Could Bartholomew have been as hungry as all that?" she murmured.

"I remember hearing Boy galloping around up here yesterday," scolded Sylvia. "Isn't it terrible!"

"But I can wear it," declared Merry Andrew stoutly. "Who's going to see the top of my shoe any-

way, unless the wind blows, and then I'll just have to sit down and curl that bad foot under me. It's lucky it wasn't my hat, or Grandmother's shoe!" She rushed out to finish her toilet.

"Well, what shall I do about the church business, Mother?" demanded Sylvia. "Do tell me! If it is my duty to try to save the old church I am willing, but you don't know how I dread it!"

"Once," said Mother slowly, "you told me that you were going to be a missionary; that you would be willing to sacrifice your personal plans, your happiness — your very life — to carry the gospel to the heathen. It seems to me I never knew a community more in need of missionary work than is this of Rosedale —"

Merry Andrew dashed in. "Why Sylvia Drew! don't you hear Grandfather down there just tearing himself to shreds, and you nowhere near ready! Hustle, for pity's sake! Next thing you'll have Grandmother up after us!"

"I guess you're right, Mother," owned Sylvia, "and the Drews as well as the others in Rosedale need missionaries. If I had known for sure I was going to labor with Mr. Clyde I would have curled my hair and tried to look as little as possible like a heathen. But there is no time for that now. I do wish I might have talked it over with you a little more. You could have posted me as to what to say and how to say it."

"Look in your own heart for that," advised Mother.

"State the case briefly and as strongly as possible. Explain how his service would hold the church for a certain number of years, during which time some new strength might develop in the community, and a self-supporting society be again established. If we lose this church, already built and paid for, we may never hope to have another."

"What's all this you two are whispering about?" demanded Merry Andrew, closing the door behind her cautiously as she came in. When the Drew family whispered among themselves it was generally understood that it was about something which would better not reach Grandmother's ears. Mrs. Drew explained to Merry Andrew while Sylvia hurried to finish getting ready.

When the two girls were safely started for Bendon, after a last delay caused by Bartholomew's blundering into the tool-house and letting out the dogs, Merry Andrew settled into the spring seat of the lumber wagon with a sigh of relief. She was flushed and a little soiled from that last tussle to persuade the Boys that they were safer in the tool-house than trangling to town after the wagon. Bartholomew had once allowed them this privilege, and the trip, fraught as it had been with the spice of new and dangerous adventure, had made a strong impression upon their collie natures, never free from the wanderlust. Bartholomew's indiscretion had heaped trouble upon the head

of Merry Andrew, who, in turn, heaped reproaches upon Bartholomew's.

Now as the two girls jogged down the road behind the slow-moving farm-horses and completely out of danger of Grandmother's overhearing anything they might say, Merry Andrew would have enjoyed "sputtering" about family troubles, but Sylvia, keyed up and nervous in view of her uncertain errand to the minister's, was in no mood to respond. Merry Andrew realized this at last, and switched to the subject uppermost in her sister's mind.

"I'm glad it is you instead of me who is going to see the minister. You won't get him to fuss with our old barn of a church, Sylvia, and you needn't think it. And for one I don't blame him."

"There's no harm in trying," sighed Sylvia. She was hopeless enough without further discouraging comment.

"How shall you begin?" questioned Merry Andrew. "Tell you what let's do: I'll pretend I'm Mr. Clyde and you go on and rehearse the interview."

Sylvia laughed, but declined to take advantage of her sister's suggestion.

"Then you be the minister and I'll be Miss Sylvia Drew appealing for help. I'm willing to do what little I can to assist."

"You can help most by looking after the lime and the nails while I do the harder errand," said Sylvia.

"I presume you will tell him all about the fight between the Pudneys and the Pierces. Such matters are apt to throw variety into a minister's life — makes easy working, you know. And tell him that Grandmother won't favor him because he isn't of her persuasion; that she's so sure that the ministers of the other churches won't get through the eye of the needle that she doesn't waste time praying for them. If everything else fails to fetch him you may tell him about me. But you better save that until the last. If that doesn't bring him, break and run! He's not the person for the Rosedale church — Whoa!"

She stopped her chatter suddenly and stood up, peering sharply into a clump of bushes by the fence.

"King of England and Emperor of India, we've got to go back! Look yonder!" Sylvia gazed where her sister pointed. A yellowish, reddish, doggish grin, composed of teeth, waggish eyes, and a great expanse of tongue shone forth.

"We've got to go back!" repeated Merry Andrew.

"But we can't. Grandmother wouldn't —"

"We're going back! My duty to my own family is paramount to everything else! Al Pierce told me yesterday that there was a mad dog in Bendon. Do you think I'm going to sacrifice those pups for a handful of nails? Or because I'm afraid of a jawing from Grandmother? That dunce of a Bartholomew has let

them out again! Whoa — back!” She was turning the team around.

“I think I’ll get out,” said Sylvia, “and go on afoot.”

“You’re a coward,” scolded Merry Andrew. “You are afraid to go back and face Grandmother.”

“Yes, I am a coward,” owned Sylvia, “but not on Grandmother’s account — not this time. But I am so much of a coward that if I don’t see Mr. Clyde today I’ll not be likely to get my courage screwed to the sticking point again. It’s like having a tooth pulled; you just can’t bear to get ready twice to face the dentist.”

“Well, I’ll drive back at a pretty good jog and overtake you before you get into town,” promised Merry Andrew.

“I don’t believe you will, for I don’t believe Grandmother will let you come back. See that storm-cloud? It’s likely to rain and you couldn’t get the lime anyway if it rained. Grandfather told us not to bring it if it looked as if we should get caught in a shower.”

“What will you do if it rains — afoot and no umbrella, and your best dress and shoes on?”

“Oh, I don’t know,” sighed Sylvia. “I’ll just have to do the best I can.”

“Maybe they’ll let me come back,” said Merry Andrew hopefully, “or, rather, maybe she’ll let me; it

won't be Grandfather who will kick up the row. I'll tell you what I'll do," she schemed, "I'll tie the team to the fence along down the road, take the dogs home by hand through the fields, and perhaps get 'em into the tool-house safe and sound without anybody seeing me. Then I'll come kerwhalloping back before you get anywhere near town. Now take it cool and walk slowly. You'll be surprised to see me come."

She called to her reluctant charges who, with glances of regret townward, went "kerwhalloping" joyously home after the team, heedless of the tool-house incarceration awaiting them. From the summit of a little knoll Merry Andrew swung a hand to Sylvia, then disappeared from view, dogs and all.

Sylvia trudged on, picking her way as daintily as possible over the roughness of the road and through the weeds at the side. At best it would be but a road-worn suppliant who would present herself at the Reverend Mr. Clyde's door. At the sound of an approaching motor she shrank farther into the weeds. Automobiles were not numerous in the vicinity.

It was young Wully McNab who brought his car to a standstill at her side.

CHAPTER IV

"I knew you'd climb the fence when you heard me coming!" he called out to Sylvia. "Come on, jump in! I know where you are going, and what you're going for."

"How do you come to know so much?" Sylvia was nettled at Wully's manner.

"A little bird told me; a little bird driving a farm team and a rattling old wagon. I came within one of running down a dog. The little bird stopped in her mad career long enough to go for me good and plenty. She said I'd probably run over you, and that you were on your way down to the preacher's to try to have him come out and save the church from my old man. She said she hoped you could get him, and that my old man would lose the church and every other last thing that he owned — or words to that effect. I told her I was going to show my willingness to help by picking you up and taking you to the reverend's house myself. Of course it wouldn't please the old man if he knew, because he is quite keen on gathering in that corner where the church stands. But he doesn't know, so jump in."

"Thank you," returned Sylvia, "but I'd rather not.

I'm anxious to keep your father from taking the church, but I want to fight fair."

"Well, this isn't his car — it's mine — or almost. He won't run it."

"Did you earn it?" Sylvia's lip curled scornfully.

"No, but if it comes to that, neither did dad. He's just sharp enough to gather in other men's earnings. And besides, you won't do the old man a mite of harm. Mr. Stroub isn't going to come out to Rosedale Corners to work for nothing. Ministers nowadays are like the rest of us, they're out for what's in it. Why say, now listen: when you get someone to preach in that old ark I'll promise to furnish the music — honest, I will. You know yourself I'm a whale on the tenor." He clapped spreading fingers to his breast and warbled exaggeratedly, yet altogether musically. "Come on, jump in. I want to give you an imitation of a young man taking a young lady somewhere — to the minister's, for instance. We'll make time that will put to blush those old mares you've just been riding behind!"

From her handbag Sylvia had taken a fountain pen and a letter which she had forgotten to drop into the R.F.D. box. She meant to sacrifice the cost of a postage stamp in a good cause. She hastily scribbled an agreement across the back and handed the letter up to Wully.

"Sign this, and then I'll let you take me to town."

"Sign?" Wully read the agreement. "Well, if

you don't remind me of my old man! 'Black-an'-white, Wully, black-an'-white, an' then you've got 'um!' You ought to get into the farm mortgage business with dad; you two would make a team!" He laughed uproariously, but signed his name at the bottom of the envelope and handed it back to Sylvia, who put it and the pen away in her handbag and immediately climbed into the car.

She knew what to expect. Young Wully was famous throughout the country for his reckless driving, and he would be sure to want to show off with a passenger aboard who had never ridden in an automobile before.

The car shot forward. Sylvia fairly gasped for breath. She clutched her gloved fingers together and stared straight ahead. She knew when Crosby's barn melted and ran by on the south side of the road, and she knew, rather than saw, that the white house with the tall silo, and the one with the iron fence, and the one with the pigsty in the front yard, were all running together, and going in an opposite direction from that in which she and young Wully were traveling. Then she saw a team coming in the distance and shut her eyes to avoid the sight of the crash. When she opened them again they were entering Bendon, and Wully had slowed up. She began suddenly to experience a delightful sensation — that of joyous, bounding motion. She was almost angry at herself that she found

the cushions of Wully McNab's machine so delightfully soft and comfortable; that the wind, whizzing by her cheeks, exhilarated her.

"Doesn't it beat the old mares up to a point?" challenged Wully, grinning back at her over his shoulder. "Now here we go to Stroub's. Hold your bonnet on. We should arrive in some sort of style if we are to impress his reverence with the importance of our mission. Want me to go in with you? I could say, 'Mr. Stroub, we have come to ask you to drive out to the old Rosedale church to preach next Sunday, so papa can't annex the church property. Papa wants to make a cow pasture of the land and a hen-house of the church. He thinks his chickens would be benefited by religious surroundings — grow up to be better hens and roosters.' It might help, although dad already pays his share of Mr. Stroub's salary here in town, and it wouldn't be policy for Stroub to antagonize him."

"But I'm not going to see Mr. Stroub," said Sylvia, "I'm going to see the other minister, Mr. Clyde."

"Oh, here now; that's not fair. He might —"

"Of course he might. If I hadn't thought he might, I wouldn't have taken my life in my hands by riding in your automobile, Wully McNab. You'd better let me out here at the corner; I'll walk down to Mr. Clyde's."

"No you won't; I never put my hand to the plow

nor to the wheel and then turn back. Where do the Clydes live? I'm a little rusty on ministers other than my own. I knew a chap in school by the name of Clyde. Good fellow, too."

"Mr. Clyde lives next door to his own church — the church which isn't yours. Does that give you any clue? "

Wully chuckled. He swung the car around the corner and came up with a great sweep in front of a quiet white house almost hidden in maples. The excitement of her first ride in an automobile had for a time taken Sylvia's mind from the ordeal of her interview with the minister, but now that it was at hand her heart beat nervously and a feeling of faintness crept over her. Young McNab jumped out and opened the door of the car.

"I'm sure I'm ever so much obliged," she began formally.

"Never mind that till the job is finished," said Wully. "Trot in now, and I'll sit out here and do, sol, fa, me, to get my voice into shape for anthems while I wait for you. Don't be any longer than you can help. I shall be anxious to know if I am in any real danger of having to keep my promise about signing. I don't think I am, but —"

"Oh, please go along! I don't want you to wait for me. I would rather —"

"But you see, so would I rather. You have in your

handbag a solemn document duly signed. I want to be assured that I haven't got into another horrible scrape — there! — someone is opening the front door. Slide, Casey, slide!"

It was the maid who had opened the door. Sylvia hurried up the walk.

"Is — Mr. Clyde in?"

The maid mumbled a response which Sylvia did not understand, and led the way into a big, dimly-lighted study. To Sylvia it was quite awe-inspiring. She heartily wished that Mother was with her. Sitting alone in that dim, scholarly room, where the walls were almost entirely covered with books, where the very air seemed heavy with learning and importance and solemnity, her temerity in venturing to ask the owner of it all to come out to preach in an old white box of a church eight miles in the country grew upon her. The fact that Wully McNab, reckless, grinning, irreverent, sat waiting in his car out in front made matters worse.

She started nervously when the door opened. She almost hoped it was the maid to say the minister was not at home. But it was not. Neither was it the minister. It was an altogether different sort of person. A young man — why, really, no older than Wully McNab himself. Sylvia realized that, although the inquiring gaze he bent upon her came by way of a pair of pince-nez glasses.

"You wished to see Mr. Clyde?" It was a boyish,

bantering voice, more so, even, than Wully McNab's.

"Yes, I —"

"I am Mr. Clyde."

"But not the Mr. Clyde I came to see — the Reverend Mr. Fletcher Clyde."

"I am sorry, but my father is out of town."

Unconsciously Sylvia made a despairing little gesture — a slight lifting of the hands and letting them fall. She felt beaten, and a bit misused. The eyes behind the glasses wandered from her to the waiting figure in the car, lolling patiently. In no other manner did young Clyde make known his suspicions save through that teasing glance, but Sylvia flamed anew. She had not meant to confide in this sarcastically smiling young man, but she could not go away leaving him to think it was a wedding party and she the prospective bride.

"When do you expect him home?" She asked the question in order to get the chance to explain more fully her reason for being there, and not that it made any difference — now — when he came. She should not come again. She had tried and — failed; let the old church go.

"He may be home next week."

"That will be too late," said Sylvia quietly, then plunged into her story in order to forestall young Clyde in directing her to the other minister's, as she imagined he was about to do. She felt that circum-

stances had played her a shabby trick — trapped her all along: First, by entangling her path with that of Wully McNab, and now whisking away the Reverend Mr. Clyde and setting in his place this other faintly smiling, facetious young student to grin at what seemed to him a trifling matter, but which to her, and to her mother, was almost a tragedy.

“If we can’t save the old church we may never hope for a new one, but with the old we might yet build up a society —”

“Why didn’t you begin sooner?” demanded the young man.

“Oh, why didn’t we!” sighed Sylvia. “But I didn’t know the time was so nearly run, at least I didn’t realize it. My mother knew, but Mother’s a timid little woman. She had given up long ago. And yet — it was Mother who persuaded me into coming here —”

“You might try Mr. Stroub.”

Sylvia shook her head. “Mrs. McNab goes regularly to Mr. Stroub’s church, and I think Mr. Stroub feels that Mr. McNab would be angry if anybody prevented him from tearing down the old church. You see, Mr. McNab says there is no need of a church at Rosedale Corners. He says, if people want to go to church let them come here to Bendon. He has probably said the same thing to Mr. Stroub. But there are lots of people in the country who would come to the

Rosedale church if there were services there who would never come to church in town."

"McNab is rich, why should he covet a rotting old church?"

"The church doesn't amount to so much, but the five acres of land which go with it will be worth a good deal of money if the electric road passes Rosedale Corners, as they think it may, and a village grows up there. Grandfather says there will surely be a town there some day. Then, you see, five acres in the heart of even a very small town would be worth a good deal of money. They may build saloons there, but there will be no church, not for a long time at least. If only we might have kept this one and then the town had grown up around it. You know the line: 'Get your spindle and your distaff ready and God will furnish the flax.'"

"I'm awfully sorry father isn't home," said young Clyde. "Is that your grandfather out there in the car?"

Sylvia laughed. "No, that's young Wully McNab. They always call him 'young Wully' because his name is the same as his father's."

"Wully McNab? But I thought it was the McNabs —"

"It is. He brought me here for a sort of joke. He thinks I can't rouse anybody to save the church, and it seems he is right, I can't. He was so sure that I

couldn't, that he promised to furnish the music if I succeeded in furnishing the minister. He thought I was going to Mr. Stroub, though, when he made that promise, and he was pretty sure Mr. Stroub wouldn't do anything to displease his father."

Young Clyde walked to the window and surveyed young Wully McNab, or rather the top of Wully's checkered cap, which was all there was to be seen, as Wully was busily taking a much-needed siesta, being a young person of irregular hours.

"Wully McNab is a good singer all right," said young Clyde suddenly.

"You know him?" exclaimed Sylvia.

"We started in college together."

"But, of course, you got ahead, because Wully wouldn't study."

"Well — Wully — er — isn't in that school any more."

"I know. And now he isn't in the other school any more."

"Not — not excused again?"

"Yes, again. 'Canned,' he calls it."

"Exactly — canned — that's right. Well, well! Wully, Wully! Yes, Wully is a singer, but — I can't imagine him singing hymns."

"There's no danger," said Sylvia bitterly, "he won't have to, although I have his pledge here in

writing." She fished the letter from her bag and handed it to Clyde, who read it and chuckled.

"What a pity father isn't home — what a pity! Say! hold on a minute, Miss —"

"Drew," Sylvia prompted.

"Why, say, father may possibly be home in time. I'll wire him and he might be able to make it — and if he couldn't, there's Uncle William. You see preaching sort of breaks out in our family every once in awhile — if father couldn't get back in time, Uncle William might be able to come. Or —" he trailed off in an absent-minded revery. Sylvia stood waiting impatiently.

"See here, Miss Drew," he said, coming out of his abstraction suddenly, "I've been a good deal impressed by your taking up this matter so bravely —"

"Oh, I didn't take it up bravely," murmured Sylvia weakly, remembering her fear.

"And I know that father would have been impressed, too. He would have helped you out. And he may be able to do so yet. Now I'll make a bargain with you: You go ahead with your spindle and distaff, and I'll sort of — sort of — help with the flax, you know. In other words, get your church open, your choir and congregation ready, and I'll see to it that there is a minister. If not father, then Uncle William; and if not Uncle William, then a preacher of

an altogether different stripe. And don't say a word to young Wully McNab; just let him think you saw father, and that father promised to come. You have him tight there, just make him stick to his word about the music. I shall come out to the opening service if for nothing else than to hear Wully sing hymns."

"It — isn't anything to joke about," said Sylvia seriously, "and I should hate to have everything ready and then no minister and no service, and the McNabs laughing at me after all. Because, you see, just a meeting won't hold the church; there must be a sermon."

"Any kind of sermon, eh? If father didn't happen to get home in time, and Uncle William couldn't make it, if I bring out an enthusiastic Mormon elder, will it fill the bill?"

"So far as the law is concerned, I suppose it would," laughed Sylvia, "but I'm sure we should prefer some other kind of preacher."

"All right, trust the flax end of the proposition to me. I certainly wish you had begun a little sooner, but we'll do the best we can. I want to hear Wully McNab sing hymns."

"What's the news?" demanded Wully McNab, as his machine began to warm up for flight.

"He said that he would see to it that we had service. We are to get the church, the choir and the con-

gregation ready, and the flax — I mean the minister — will be forthcoming. The church and the congregation, Merry Andrew and I will look after; the music I hand over to you.”

“Governor Johnson!” breathed Wully. “Why, I —”

“There’s no backing out, Mr. Wully McNab. ‘Black-an’-white, black-an’-white, Wully, an’ there you’ve got ’em!’” She pulled the letter out and flourished it, then put it carefully back in her bag.

“But what do you suppose my father will say?”

“I suppose he’ll be angry, but you should have thought of that before you promised.” The car leaped forward. Wully threw back his head and laughed loudly.

“Oh, I’ll stand pat. You’ve got me in black-and-white, you Miss Shylock!”

“And it must be good music, and suitable music,” gasped Sylvia. The speed of the car was once more taking away her breath. They had already arrived on the outskirts of Bendon on their homeward flight.

“Is there any sort of a musical instrument in the old barracks?”

“The church organ is still there.”

“I can imagine its bray after standing unused in a damp church for years.”

“Well, you’d better look into that in time. The music — organ and all — will be left to you entirely.

You will be held responsible for any brays heard in that church — hadn't you better drive a little slower, Wully? There's a farm team — or something — oh, well — we've passed it — but, honestly, if you want me to enjoy the ride, please go a little slower."

"I don't want you to enjoy it. I'm not enjoying it. I did enjoy it going into town, but, really, Miss Drew, I don't know when a young lady has made me so thoroughly unhappy as you have this afternoon. I'm bound to do it, though; I'll furnish that music if it kills everybody in Rosedale. And which of you Drew girls sings alto?"

"Merry Andrew can sing alto, but whether she will or not is another question."

"We'll see about that; a bird that can sing and won't —" quoted Wully grumpily.

"I think she will be glad to do anything to help. She told me she would."

"Now let me se-e-e-e-, you're the soprano, Merry Andrew the alto, I, tenor — where in all creation can we scare up a bass? Can your grandfather sing?"

"He sings, but not bass. He sings a cracked sort of falsetto."

"We don't want him, then; there'll be enough of that quality in the tenor."

The machine was still swinging and swaying over the country road at a terrific speed, but Sylvia had become somewhat accustomed to flying, and again ex-

perienced an exhilaration which took the place of fear.

"The old grays are going to seem dreadfully slow after this," she breathed.

"I wish I'd never picked you up!" grumbled Wully, and Sylvia giggled.

They swept into the home yard. "You're still alive, you see," triumphed Wully. "Now the next time I want to take you out in the car you won't be afraid to go, will you?"

"Yes, I shall be more afraid," owned Sylvia. "Your recklessness with this car is terrible. One realizes it more when they are in the car than they do when they are on the ground. I presume one couldn't realize it any more deeply unless you had just run over one."

Merry Andrew came round the corner of the house followed by the dogs. She shook a warning finger and came close to the car.

"You'd better skid right out of here, Wully McNab! There's been awful doings, and Grandmother says she has just about reached the end of her patience!"

"Pooh!" said Wully, "who's afraid of your grandmother! I think I'll stay to lunch."

"Not on my invitation, you wont!" returned Merry Andrew.

"Then I'll go in and try to coax an invitation from your grandmother." He went into the house.

"And he'll get it, too!" fumed Merry Andrew. "Anything by the name of McNab can wind Grandmother round his little finger. And she will probably make him a present of Boy, and throw Twoboy in for good measure! But he won't get 'em if she does!"

"Now, where in the world have you been, and how comes it that you are here instead of in Bendon, where you said you were going? Here I've been feeling so sorry for you — hoofing it clear to town through the mud — and still worse, hoofing it clear back again — for, you see, Grandmother set her foot right down that I shouldn't go back, nails or no nails, lime or no lime. She was so mad at me and at the dogs and at Mrs. Pierce and Grandfather and — everybody; and then when I had to tell her that you had gone on afoot to town, that capped the climax, and she was madder at you than at all the rest put together. 'What possessed her,' she says, 'does she expect to carry a load of lime home on her back? What has she gone for, anyway?'"

"I wasn't going to tell her that you had gone to try to coax a minister out to help wrest the church and five acres from her beloved old McNab. I was just trying to think up an awful whopper to tell her, when Mother comes right out and stands up, white and trembling, and tells her the whole truth!

"Well, Sylvia Drew, you should have seen Grandmother! — or, rather, you should have heard her. She

said things to Mother that I will never forgive her for if I live to be a hundred! Mean, cutting things — ingratitude — objects of charity — oh, I don't know what all! She demanded that Mother put a stop to all this agitation about the church. She said the idea of offending the McNabs, the only neighbors we have! And Evangeline Pudney hanging on to the screen door and listening to every word, too. And old Mrs. Pierce sitting there with an arnica bandage around her shin —”

“Mrs. Pierce? What was the matter with Mrs. Pierce, and how did she happen to be at our house, and bandaged?” demanded Sylvia.

“Why, she began the whole trouble! If it hadn't been for her, you and I would have jogged comfortably along to town, got our lime and our nails and our ministers, and come home in peace and tranquillity. But no, the minute we got out of sight, and the boys all nice and safe and howling in the tool-house — over came Mrs. Peirce to borrow some green paint. Of course Grandmother would never stop her work to go to the tool-house and get the green paint, so she sends Mrs. Pierce. Mrs. Pierce opens the tool-house door, and the dogs, being in a hurry to follow you and me to town — bound right at her and over her. She yells like a wild Indian and pitches headlong down the tool-house steps, and over the rain-barrel, and gets wedged in between the barrel and the steps. And Mother was

at work in my place in the west cornfield, so Grandmother was alone. And I suppose she had a tussle hauling Mrs. Pierce out and bandaging her.

"Then, in due time, comes poor me trailing home with the dogs, and you gone on mysteriously to town. And now here you come, just as mysteriously, popping home before dinner with Wully McNab. Did he pick you up on the road and wouldn't let you go to see the minister after all?"

"No, Merry Andrew, he took me to see the minister and brought me home again."

"Him?" demanded Merry Andrew forcefully, if ungrammatically.

"Yes, 'him.'"

"But you haven't had time."

"Merry Andrew, until you have taken a trip in an automobile with young Wully McNab you don't realize how little time is actually required to get somewhere and back again. If it hadn't been for the half hour I spent in the minister's house, probably, we should have overtaken you and the grays, jumped you, and been home to take the brunt end of the trouble with Grandmother, instead of leaving it all to you, you poor little thing."

"Did you really see the minister, and is he going to preach and save the church?"

"The minister is away from home. But somebody else promised that somebody would preach — and

Wully McNab is going to lead the singing and —”

“ See here, Sylvia, are you plumb crazy? Somebody, you don’t know who, has promised, you don’t know what; and Wully McNab is to take charge! And now what sort of a mixup have you got into anyhow? ”

“ Well, that’s about the way of it at present,” Sylvia owned. “ But anyhow, I’ve done the best I could, and it hasn’t been easy, either. I have made a start, at least with the spindle and distaff — ”

“ Come on in, girls; dinner’s ready!” The summons was from Wully McNab, who was grinning and grimacing at them from the front door.

CHAPTER V

Sometimes that which at first glance seems a calamity turns out to be a blessing. It was so with Wully McNab's noon visit. As Merry Andrew prophesied, the presence of a McNab, even the least McNab, exerted a soothing influence upon Grandmother's overwrought nerves. She did not present him with either of the dogs; in fact, the word "dog" was not mentioned. But the word "church" was repeated a great many times. Mother appeared pale and unhappy; Grandfather cowed and silent, Merry Andrew with a protuberant under jaw and a very apparent chip-on-shoulder attitude. But no one attempted to knock the chip off, and after Wully had issued a blanket invitation to ride in his car (which no one but Bartholomew Vonvolkenberg accepted) matters cooled down to a sort of armed neutrality among the Drews.

After the dishes were washed, the vegetables and dessert ready for supper, and Grandmother gone to her room to piece quilts for an hour, the girls shouldered pails and mops and started for the church.

The peacefully decaying old edifice certainly bore no hint as yet of becoming a storm center. Its pallid white clapboards sagged here and there, its front plat-

form had given way completely at one end, and some of the boards had disappeared, presumably, as Merry Andrew suggested, to stop a hole to keep the winter wind away from the McNab pigs. The mayweed, thick, pungent, dusty, whitened the generous yard; the horse sheds, gauntly empty, stood at an unusual distance from the church. To the north and west, they served as a windbreak in winter. At the end of the north shed was a very deep and very good well, one of the best in that section, the farmers said. McNab had raised a windmill over that well, and run a spout to a drinking-trough in the adjoining pasture, which belonged to him. Here his stock assembled to drink, chew their cuds and stamp flies. Bees droned among the mayweed, and when the breeze swept over the insignificant yellow-and-white heads of the flowers, they swayed and bent and recovered themselves in a lonesome way, producing a sensation of utter neglect and decay. Nothing more strongly indicates desertion and ruin than thick mayweed in a country yard. No tree or bush broke the bleak whiteness, or cast a shadow on the still bleaker whiteness of the building. One of the windows had been broken by the helpful hand of youth; the girls found the fragments of glass scattered over the pews after they had succeeded in manipulating the rusty lock and gaining the interior. The building gave forth a ghostly, hollow return to the unusual sound of human voices.

It was no easy task to put the deserted church into usable shape. The high windows must be washed, but the ladder which belonged in the attic had been carried away.

"McNab, again!" Merry Andrew concluded. "He's been taking it over piecemeal for years, and he'll probably get it all next week, in spite of our digging!"

Sylvia would not admit as much, although she harbored secret misgivings.

They built a shaky scaffolding of boards and movable seats, and washed the windows as best they could; they swept the dust from walls and pews, and scrubbed the floor. Then they sat down for a short breathing spell before starting for home with their brooms and scrubcloths.

"It is as ready as we can make it," announced Sylvia; "now to rouse a congregation."

"Well, I draw the line at that," returned Merry Andrew. "I've scrubbed and dug the dirt, and I'm willing to sing in the choir (provided there ever is one — when I remember whose hands it has been left in I doubt if there ever is a choir) but when it comes to doing missionary work among the heathen of Rosedale, you'll just have to count me out! Why, Sylvia, this is the way I should go at it:

"'Good morning, Mrs. Pudney.'

“ ‘ Why, good morning, Merry Andrew. How’s Gram’ma Drew?’ ”

“ ‘ Well enough, thank you; but as cross as a bear. Grandfather Drew is a sick man, but just as gentle and patient as any old wooly lamb. We have fixed up the church, and my sister has coaxed a minister from somewhere — she doesn’t seem to know, herself, from exactly where — to come out and preach to us. That limb o’ satan, young Wully McNab, is going to lead the singing. And now you must come out to church. Paint up the way you do when you go to the dances, curl your hair, and put on that hat of yours which is twenty years too young for you. Primp up your silly daughter, Dorothy, and that big-mouthed boy, Earl — who probably broke the church windows; he’s none too good for it—and, for pity’s sake, wash that dirty young one, Evangeline, who scrapes up and down our screen door all the time, and sticks her toes through the wire, and runs out her tongue and sasses my mother — wash her up for once this year, and bring her to church to see how decent folks act!’ ”

“ ‘ Why, Mary Ann Drew! You impudent th-i-n-g! I’m just goin’ right over an’ complain to your gram’ma!’ ”

“ ‘ Well, I don’t care if you do. I’m getting so reckless Grandmother can’t do anything with me much longer anyhow.’ ”

Sheer weariness, rather than her sister's mimicry, elicited Sylvia's laughter, which, in turn, awoke all the clattering echoes of the soapy edifice. A thudding knock on the outside door brought a sudden silence.

"Old McNab, I bet a cookie!" hissed Merry Andrew, and seizing a broom, put herself in an attitude of mock defense.

Instead of old McNab it was young Wully at the door.

"I thought all this cackling meant something," he grinned. "Either that the church was getting cleaned or that dad had turned the hens in already. That's what he's planning to do — make the old shack into a henhouse."

"Doesn't it look nice?" boasted Sylvia.

"It looks better than it smells; it smells soapy."

"It does smell a little sudsy as yet, but that will wear away. We had to scrub pretty hard on the mouldy place over on the floor yonder where the rain has beaten in through the broken window. I hope it doesn't rain next Sunday; if it does, you folks in the choir will be apt to sing in liquid tones."

"You're really going to stick me to that bargain, Sylvia?"

"I certainly am. A scrap of paper is to be binding in this case."

"Well, Gene's home. I found her there when I

got back with the car today. Came on the Northwestern to Cooperstown and rode over with the Andersons. I'll rope her into the sangerfest. It will help out a good deal."

Sylvia felt a chill at Wully's news of the presence of his sister in the neighborhood. Gene McNab spent most of her time in the East, the advantages of Bendon not being deemed adequate for the finishing of her education. Gene McNab had everything which Sylvia yearned for but might not have. According to her fond mother's report, Gene was an unrivaled singer, and when Gene "took the organ" pupils and tutors alike listened in awe.

"Will she be willing to help?" murmured Sylvia.

"I don't know whether she'll be willing or not; I only know she's going to. I told her the mess I was in and that I proposed that she should help me out."

"Of course, if you have issued your orders that settles it," said Merry Andrew.

Wully gripped the back of the pew. "Goodness, but that startled me!" He approached and touched Merry Andrew's nose with a timid forefinger. "Can it really talk? I supposed it was a carved ornament on the end of the pew."

"The pews will all talk when the singing begins next Sunday; they'll rise and howl!" snapped Merry Andrew,

"Oh, that reminds me," went on Wully,— "I wish you'd ask Mr. Pudney to sing with us. Gene says he used to growl bass pretty well."

"Who's on this music committee?" demanded Merry Andrew. "I should think that cleaning the church, and finding the minister, and canvassing the neighborhood for a congregation, and singing in the choir, was quite enough for poor Sylvia to do!"

"It's speaking again," murmured Wully, making a feint of investigating the nose again.

"And if you stick your finger in my face it will be biting again!" warned Merry Andrew.

"About my asking Pudney," owned Wully, "to tell the truth, I don't dare set foot on Pudney ground. He threatened to shoot me if I did, and in some ways, Pudney is a man of his word. If you are going to canvass the neighborhood, Sylvia, it will be dead easy for you to see Pudney. Don't breathe that there are to be any McNabs in the choir; and tell him that the Pierces are anxious to sing, but that you wouldn't have 'em; that'll fetch him."

"How did that Pudney-Pierce quarrel start in the first place?"

"Politics. Pierce is on the opposite side of the fence from Pudney. They began at the 'your-party-couldn't-and-your-candidate didn't' stage, and swept right along down until now neither one will write his name because the names begin with the same letter."

"Is it on account of politics that Mr. Pudney hates your father?" asked Sylvia.

"No, oh, no; my old man doesn't go in for either politics or religion. While other men argue, dad pops in and picks up pennies. Alliterative and expressive — that sentence, wasn't it? He has saved pennies so successfully that all his neighbors hate him."

"They'll never hate his son for the same reason," said Merry Andrew loftily.

"Well — anyhow, you ask old Pudney to sing bass, and — oh, yes, for goodness sake, don't let Dorothy Pudney get loose in the choir — sort of tag her father in, you know; nor Mrs. Pudney, either. They'd look well, but sound like a riot. You'll have to be a little careful about that. Good bye, Mary Ann. I'm coming over for my dog next week. I've arranged a match between him and Pete Swanson's bull terrier. If the collie were only a little older I verily believe he could lick Pete's pup — oh, say — yes — I nearly forgot! Choir practice here at the church Friday evening. Gene says we may need a lung specialist for the organ before we can do a thing with it. In case we do, it would give us a chance to have the operation on Saturday."

When the girls returned from cleaning the church an ominous silence rested over the family. They had expected trouble, and had sought surreptitious little

interviews with Mother. Had Grandmother scolded about their being away? Said anything more against their work in the church?

No, Grandmother had been very noncommittal on the subject, Mother said. A little bewildered, possibly. The fact that Mr. McNab wanted, and intended, to take over the church property (which he had a lawful right to do) was offset by the activities of his own son against the fruition of his plans. But then young Wully was entirely irresponsible at best. It was like him to go against his own interests through sheer contrariness, Grandmother had said. That matter of the dogs, for instance: He had wanted the dog — had offered to buy it — and when she had given it to him, had suddenly changed his mind and told Grandmother that Merry Andrew had a better right to say what was to become of those two collies than any other person on earth; she had saved their lives and had fought for them ever since.

“Did young Wully McNab tell Grandmother that?” whispered Merry Andrew excitedly. “Did he, Mother?” They were at the supper-table while Grandmother, out by the dead maple, took a census of the young turkeys. “And here I’ve been abusing him every time I got a chance because I thought he was trying to get my dogs! He must have some good in him after all!”

“Everybody has, dear.”

"I suppose so; but what I want to know is, why some people take so much trouble to hide it? Wully McNab, for instance — making me believe he was fighting against me when all the time he was fighting for me! And Grandmother, herself! Why doesn't she let a little of her goodness stick out, like the corner of a boy's clean pocket handkerchief? I thought Grandmother had cooled off a good deal on the dog question."

"What about the time you nearly died with the measles, and poor Grandmother sat all night with you in her arms?"

"Oh, I was a baby then; nobody can help being kind to a baby, but it takes real Christian charity to be kind to a big spraddling girl like me. Of course I know that Grandmother has Christian charity, but why doesn't she show it?"

At the supper table Grandmother was even more bewildered when the girls announced that Gene McNab was home from the East and was going to help in the choir.

"A nice foolish lot you will look with a choir, but no congregation and no minister," sneered Grandmother. "And just singing won't hold the church; it's the preaching that's to hold it, and that you'll not get, I am sure. And suppose you did; what good would it do you to hold the church, empty and rotting, another ten years? You might better let Mr.

McNab take what belongs to him and put it to some use! It is just a matter of youthful contrariness which your mother and grandfather should not uphold you in. If I had my say, you should drop the whole matter. It is not one for children to mix up in at best. It should be left to older people to decide."

"But suppose the older people just sit and won't do a thing—" began Merry Andrew, when a warning kick under the table from Sylvia, and an appealing glance from Mother, caused her to branch off into a harmless request for Bartholomew to pass the potatoes.

Grandfather ate steadily in a worried silence, and Bartholomew inquired suddenly if Merry Andrew knew that "One or t'other of the dogs had dug a hole about two feet square and some two or three feet deep in among the tomaters." He didn't know what for — skunks, he guessed.

CHAPTER VI

Friday was cleaning day at the Drew home. When no out-of-door work called, Merry Andrew's allotment was Mother's room, her own, the stairs and the upper hall. Mother did the other rooms upstairs and the spare room downstairs; Sylvia had the dining-room, living-room and kitchen, while Grandmother superintended the entire procedure and looked after the cellar. Friday was the one day that Sylvia was glad there was no porch on the house. Whether or not the sun rose, whether there was war in Europe or calamity at home, the Drew sweeping programme was carried out to the last particular.

Friday was also visiting day. If the cleaning moved along without a hitch, it was usually finished by noon, leaving the afternoon for visits.

But if Merry Andrew was called to watch cattle, cut corn, drive reaper, or to any other of the numberless tasks which saved Grandfather the expense of another hired man, her share of the Friday's cleaning was divided between Sylvia and her mother, Grandmother merely expending a little more force upon superintendence.

But this particular Friday, although Merry Andrew had to "go into the corn," Grandmother made ar-

rangements to call upon Mrs. McNab. This virtually added the cellar to Sylvia's burden, but she accepted it uncomplainingly.

In due time Grandmother, dressed in her "second black," her turnover collar and little fringed silk neck-bow, her black toque set becomingly above her care-wrinkled brow and far-sighted glasses, started out, pointed due south-west-by-south — McNabwards. She was going — as all the family felt sure — to relieve her bewilderment; to make sure how the McNabs stood, as a body, in order to know how to command the forces in her own camp. Mother and Sylvia held a hurried consultation, and fifteen minutes later Sylvia, also, was on the road, bent on drumming up her congregation.

Far afield she caught sight of Merry Andrew working shoulder to shoulder with Bartholomew and Grandfather cutting corn; her dogs, as usual, officiously doing something which might better be left undone. Sylvia swung a hand and Merry Andrew responded, then each went on with her appointed task. Cutting corn is not easy work, but Sylvia felt before the close of day that Merry Andrew's task was lighter than her own.

In many instances, after an unsatisfactory interview with the wife, Sylvia plodded across strips of early ploughing or stubble ground, to talk with husband or boys. At one or two places she met with

scant courtesy; but in the main her neighbors listened soberly and gave a more or less hearty promise. When she reviewed her wanderings on her homeward way she counted those who had promised and half promised, and found to her astonishment that if they all came the church would be comfortably filled.

The Pudneys and Pierces she left until the last, they being near her own home; and she wished to interview Mr. Pudney rather than the other members of the family.

She found the Pudneys waiting for supper. Mrs. Pudney was busy finishing an elaborate silk waist. She stitched away at the sewing-machine in the corner, while her daughter Dorothy put a dirty cloth askew upon the table, and brought in the boiled potatoes, bread, salt pork, "cold-slaw" and underdone apple pie. Mr. Pudney — much older than his wife — let himself down into his chair with a groan. He was a man whom all the world combined to wrong; trusts, political parties, family and friends. According to Mr. Pudney no one did what was right, from the president to the pathmaster. His small black eyes peered out from behind poor cheap glasses, and the lines in his leather-colored face were snarling lines.

"Sing?" he sneered in answer to Sylvia's gentle request, "I don't know why a man should sing nowadays — especially a laborin' man! There ain't much to sing for!"

Sylvia looked with compassion upon his knotted hands and sweat-soiled clothing, and felt that he was right; there was little in his life to make him desire to sing. His was a hopeless case of mortgage and mismanagement.

"It seems to me it will sort of rest us all," said Sylvia humbly. "We farmers all work hard, and Sunday is too much like all the other days. To get together and sing, and listen to good words, it seems to me, might rest us."

"Well, if pa don't care to go into the choir me an' Dorothy can go," suggested Mrs. Pudney. Sylvia tried to evade the offer.

"For this one service we are in need of nothing but a bass singer. Later — perhaps — if we succeed in redeeming the church —"

"I'll sing, if singin' will keep anything out of the clutches of old McNab!" snarled Pudney. "If ever there was a —"

"They say Gene's back," put in Mrs. Pudney. "I s'pose she'll be for astonishin' the natives with her city clothes. I never did like her. High-nosed thing! She don't seem to pick up a husband in the East very fast. I s'pose it would cut old Wully up pretty bad if his only girl should turn out an old maid."

"She's homely as a bear!" said Dorothy, slapping a plate of soft butter into the middle of the table, and

bringing in a pot of tea which had been boiling in plain sight on the kitchen range for over ten minutes.

"So you was out with young Wully in his automobile, I understand," went on Mrs. Pudney, shaking the raveling from her work and pushing the machine back for the night. "It's quite a car, I guess. He's goin' to be like his old dad — too stingy to live, I'm afraid — Behave yourself, Evangeline Pudney! Don't you see you're a drippin' that molasses all over everything? If you don't clear out I'll slap you good, now! I met him the other day, and I says, 'Why don't you come over an' give Dorothy an' me a ride?' He grinned and never said a word; just whizzed out of sight. They say it ain't safe to ride with him. He drives something terrible! The old man is afraid to run the car, they say. How'd he come to take you out?"

"Oh, he just picked me up on the road," said Sylvia. "I was on my way to town —"

Her explanation became unnecessary, for at that moment Mrs. Pudney grasped her youngest by the slack of her waist and haled her away to the kitchen where she administered chastisement noisy enough to have been more effective.

When Sylvia made her escape with a sample or two of soil from Evangeline's shoes, and a few drippings of molasses on the front of her skirt, she had the sat-

isfaction of knowing that Mr. Pudney would come to choir practice at the church, and that, though Mrs. Pudney and Dorothy would very likely accompany him, they would not expect to sing. How young Wully McNab's being choir leader would affect the easily-tangled Pudney nerves remained to be seen. Somehow, Sylvia had a feeling that once there at the church young Wully's boyish fooleries would attract, rather than repel, Mr. Pudney.

She would gladly have left the last call — that at the Pierces' — until the next morning, but she knew it would not be politic to do so. If the Pierces discovered that their invitation had not been given the same day as that of the Pudneys, they would at once become enemies, rather than friends, of the church movement.

When Sylvia reached home Grandmother had already arrived, supper was over and the dishes washed, but Mother had saved a "bite" in the warming-oven, which tasted delicious to the overworked canvasser.

"And what did Grandmother make out at McNab's?" whispered Sylvia as she hastily ate her supper.

"The enemy," explained Merry Andrew in an exaggerated hiss, "is completely disorganized. Old King McNab is raging; the queen, calm and collected, lies low and doesn't express opinions; the crown prince keeps pretty well out of the clearing at present, and the Princess Gene, as usual, goes serenely on her way

doing just about as she pleases. Grandmother doesn't think that Gene approves of the church project any more than does her paw-paw, but is going to help because her brother tells her she's got to. None of them knows the bet, or dare, or whatever you call it, between you and young Wully, you schemer you! How did you manage it, Sylvia?"

Like a great many things in this world, choir practice did not turn out altogether as Sylvia imagined it was going to. Part of it was better and part worse. She had forgotten to provide lamps, and the rehearsal went forward literally under the light of pine knots obtained from the side of a packing-box by the help of Wully's pocket-knife. Boy and Twoboy appeared inopportunely, as usual, and joined so enthusiastically in the first anthem that they were summarily ejected by Mr. Pudney, who was out of all sorts through finding the McNabs figuring so largely in the choir. A number of times he flung down his book declaring there was no use, he couldn't see the music, and if he could, he couldn't sing it, it was so "highfalutin'," and he didn't believe he was "goin' to fool round with it anyhow!"

One of the satisfactory surprises was the helpfulness of Gene McNab. She was not a bit "stuck up" by her culture and knowledge of the world. Indeed, they seemed to have developed in her a hearty tolerance with her surroundings. She graciously helped

Sylvia with a hard place in the anthem — she had not herself “taken the organ” after all — and she alternately coaxed and joked Mr. Pudney along in his bass part. She sparred delightfully with her brother, showing at once her affection for him and her impatience at his shortcomings. She praised Merry Andrew’s voice.

“It is pretty when you talk and it’s delightful when you sing — all supple tenderness and depth; just what a contralto voice should be. I wish you would come over and practice some duets with me, Merry Andrew, will you?” Sylvia’s heart swelled with gratitude toward this world-wise young woman who was entering with such helpful eagerness into their forlorn scheme. That which pleased her more than all else was the way in which Gene spoke of services yet to come.

“We’ll try this anthem next time,” or, “I know a book of beautiful sacred songs which I shall send for.”

“You don’t expect me to keep this thing up right along, do you?” challenged Wully.

“Aren’t you the one I heard bragging that he never began a thing and then backed out?” demanded his sister.

“I may be, but when Sylvia Drew got me into this I didn’t consider it a life sentence.”

“Well, never mind; don’t cry. And please hold that torch more carefully; you came within one of setting my hat on fire.”

"If we'd had a light we might have got that anthem halfway decent," groaned Pudney.

"It's well enough," said Wully. "There'll be no one to hear it except Mrs. Drew and your wife and daughter."

"You needn't bank on my wife bein' here," said Pudney. "Anyway, I heard her say if it rained you wouldn't ketch her and Dorothy out to spoil their clothes, an' by the way the wind holds tonight I think it's goin' to suds down tomorrer, and the storm will probably last over Sunday."

"What time we got to strike the gravel Sunday morning, Sylvia?" asked the choir leader.

"We had better get here early and run this last piece through before the minister comes; don't you think?" she suggested.

"What hour does that mean — early?" demanded Wully.

"Well — nine o'clock."

"Nine! Why, say, that's before I get up Sunday mornings. If you're going to practice that anthem at nine o'clock, you'll have to stand round my pillow and sing it." They conceded a half hour.

"You'll have to git along without me," announced Mr. Pudney. "I've got chores to do Sunday mornin's."

"Very well, Mr. Pudney," cut in Gene cheerfully, "you are letter-perfect in your part anyway." And

in a whisper to Sylvia, "You couldn't keep him away. He loves to sing, poor man, and, I think, doesn't often have a chance."

They came out, feeling their way over the broken platform. "We'll give a concert," said Gene, "and raise money for a new platform and lamps and a stove."

"They will be so nice for the hens to roost on after dad has the church all snugly backed up against our corncrib," suggested Wully.

"You bet he's right," Mr. Pudney grumbled to the Drew girls after the McNabs had said good night and turned southwards toward home. "Old McNab ain't one to see five dollars slip through his fingers, let alone five acres of the best land around Rosedale Corners. That there girl of his was kindah nice; and the boy was whiter'n I've ever seen him before. I jucks! I druv him off my land the last time I met up with him. I says, says I, 'Don't you ever set foot on my land again!' and he never has, nuther."

"And there he has returned the compliment by inviting you to sing the anthem at his bedside," chided Merry Andrew.

"Humph! Yes — well, he'll have to sing it round my bedside, instead, I guess."

"On stilts, I suppose, so as not to step on your land," laughed Merry Andrew, and Mr. Pudney came

very near smiling as he bade the girls good night and went on to his own gate.

"I feel terribly, Merry Andrew," owned Sylvia when they were alone. "I feel like a little child who had put forth a hand to a great wheel, which it was afraid of and didn't know much about, and had set the wheel to turning, and then could only stand in fear to see the big thing move, knowing that he had started it, but that if the fate of the world depended on his stopping it again he couldn't do it. I have stirred up all these people, and whether they come to church Sunday morning or not, they'll all be thinking about it, and about me; and, if the minister doesn't come, laughing at me! I don't believe I shall sleep a wink until after Sunday!"

"And then you'll go to sleep in church and snore, maybe; and Wully McNab — he's to be usher, I heard him say — will put you out for disturbing the meeting. How silly to feel that way! You ought to be proud of having started in on a big job of doing good all by yourself."

"Not by myself at all, Merry Andrew; if Mother hadn't shoved me off the plank I'd never have made the dive in the world."

"We'll admit that Mother started you, and that you made the dive, as you say; and all the more credit to you in view of the fact that you didn't care especially

for diving. But you did your duty as you and Mother saw it, and if it comes to nothing, you two are the last ones who ought to feel ashamed. It's Grandmother, and old McNab, and Mrs. Pudney, and all the rest of Rosedale who ought to feel ashamed, sitting around like a lot of lazy lumps and losing five acres of land and a perfectly good church! The way to look at it is this: That victory already perches on our banners, and that we shall have more than just this one meeting, and that heathens, like me and Wully McNab and Charley Wohoskey, will be more or less civilized through the influence of those meetings."

"I believe that," owned Sylvia. "The good it will do will reach out and out through all eternity — that is — it might; it is possible, you know. And all through the timid little effort of a woman like Mother who pushed me off the plank."

They were at the kitchen door now, and Merry Andrew paused in a reflective attitude with her hand on the doorknob.

"But — just suppose, that little teenty-twenty shove which Mother gave you had been toward the bad instead of toward the good? Nobody could ever tell how far the effect of it might reach, or how many would be influenced by it, could they?"

"No, Merry Andrew."

"It makes a body feel a little anxious about how he does his jostling in this world, doesn't it?"

CHAPTER VII

Sunday morning Sylvia went early to the church. It had been a struggle to get away, for the spirit of contrariness had possessed not only Grandmother, but Bartholomew Vonvolkenberg, Boy, Twoboy, and each and every calf and turkey on the Drew place. But at last Sylvia dropped other duties and went upstairs to put on her best dress, a soft gray wool, her gray straw hat with its bunch of pink roses, and her long white cotton gloves. In the kitchen door she met Merry Andrew, her face the color of a jacqueminot rose, her dark hair flying in the breeze. She was still in her working gear.

"My, but you look splendid!" Merry Andrew gasped in admiration. She had just succeeded in prying the calf's head from the only place in the fence where a calf could possibly get caught, and in persuading the dogs to postpone a digging contest which would have completely finished the tomatoes.

"Now come as soon as you can," Sylvia cautioned, "and see if you can't coax Grandfather to come."

"Oh, I'll toll in as many of the family as I am able to," promised Merry Andrew largely.

"There are two members that we can dispense with," said Sylvia.

"Who, Grandmother and Bartholomew?"

Sylvia ignored her sister's foolery.

"And mind you get them safely into the tool-house and lock, and double lock the door. You know as well as I do they would come galloping right up into the choir just as they did Friday night." Merry Andrew promised and Sylvia hurried on her way. She carried the key to the church and she was going early to make sure that everything was in order. The rain had beaten wildly all Friday night and stopped on Saturday in time to give the roads a chance to settle and dry. The sun was like the sun of midsummer.

"If they don't come they can't lay it to the weather," mused Sylvia.

When she reached the top of the knoll from which the church was visible she saw a man waiting on the platform and she hurried forward. Perhaps it was the minister, or perhaps it was Mr. McNab to forbid them the use of the church.

It was Mr. Pudney (true to Gene McNab's prophecy) waiting with his anthem book under his arm.

The church fairly clashed with echoes as Sylvia went about with a dustcloth touching the pulpit, the chairs, the railings, while Mr. Pudney boomed over his part like a cornered bumblebee.

Presently Gene McNab came wearing a stylish tan

gown and black hat. She brought a sheaf of gladioluses which she arranged in a big vase beside the pulpit. From that moment Sylvia loved her.

"Mother's coming," she told Sylvia, who clasped her hands in rapture.

"Oh, it's lovely of her — just lovely!"

Gene laughed. "Why, she's so pleased about Wully — his singing, you know — that you couldn't have kept her away."

They had gone through the anthem twice before the leader arrived "all fussed up," as he declared, with the mighty haste he had been obliged to make. "Dad's coming," he announced, and Sylvia could scarcely believe she had heard aright.

"Is he, really?" cried Gene, all in a flutter. "He told me positively that he would not!"

"Well, he's coming," said Wully, "and if the minister doesn't get round to begin before noon he's going to turn the hens in. Time's up today noon, you know."

Merry Andrew appeared, redder and more like a rose than ever, in her white dress and rakish hat swathed about with a Bulgarian ribbon. She brought Mother's big Bible, and Sylvia gasped. She had altogether overlooked the necessity of a Bible.

"Mother thought of it," owned Merry Andrew, all out of breath from the pace at which she had come.

Just as they finished, the Wöhoskey family arrived

— eight of them. They were about to settle in pews down by the door, but Wully McNab hurried down to them and brought them, with something of a flourish, well up to the front.

“Glad the Wohoskeys got here early so I could practice on ’em,” he told Merry Andrew in a stage whisper.

Before the Wohoskeys were fairly settled the Shultzes arrived, and then the Andersons, and then the Smiths. The church echoed no longer. It seemed filled and waiting. Sylvia trembled for fear the Reverend Mr. Fletcher Clyde would not, after all, come in time.

Grandfather, Grandmother and Mother came; and suddenly it was really the Sabbath, with the pleasant, solemn hush which comes just before service, brooding over the house, broken now and then by newcomers rustling into their seats. Their feet no longer seemed to clatter upon the bare floor of the aisles. If they did, the sound was not apparent in the filling church. There were the Pierces, and there was Mrs. Pudney in a hat so comprehensive that it could never make much difference to the persons immediately behind her whether there was a minister or not. And there was Wully McNab, serious now, and handsome, showing the people to their pews like a young prince.

Presently in came Mrs. McNab in lavender silk, and

a little puff of a lavender bonnet resting upon her snow-white hair. And lo! behind her who but Mr. McNab himself, for the first time in the memory of man in a stiff collar and a white shirt. His sun-burned ears leaned away from his close-cropped gray old head the same as ever; the squint of his shrewd eyes among their wrinkles was the same everyday squint. Yet still not the same. In place of old McNab, the skinflint, he was Mr. McNab, a law-abiding, well-wishing member of society, waiting with his neighbors to listen to the preaching of the gospel.

Every time now that the door opened Sylvia's heart gave a throb. Now it was the Peters boys, and now Bartholomew in his new suit, but with a pocket handkerchief knotted around his throat in place of a collar. Bartholomew never had been able to assemble an entire outfit at once. If his shoes were new, his coat was out-at-elbow. There was always somewhere a weakness in his defenses.

Now came the Hendersons from across "on the other road," and there was really trouble in getting them seated satisfactorily because the church was already filled. Sylvia gazed down into the anxious eyes of Mother, sitting apparently so placid there in the pew below, and prayed a trembling little prayer:

"Our spindle and our distaff is ready, dear Lord; do Thou send the flax!"

The door opened and someone came in. Wully McNab had come to his place in the choir. He bent to whisper excitedly to Sylvia.

"If it isn't Bob Clyde himself, instead of his old man!"

Sylvia stared into the youthful face coming up the aisle. A little pale it was, but the lips were set and determined. Was he coming to tell her that after all his father had not been able to get home in time?

He did not come to her, but mounted the pulpit steps and sat down in the pulpit chair, then smiled his recognition across at Wully McNab. Sylvia thrust a scrap of paper into Wully's hand with the hymn numbers upon it and motioned him to take it to young Clyde.

The two boys clasped hands with fitting solemnity there before a congregation which had gathered in good faith and must be treated accordingly. They whispered together a moment, then Wully stepped back into his place, and Robert Clyde stood up before the people.

He began his excuses with much diffidence. His father was to have spoken to them, but a train wreck and consequent delay had prevented. He begged their forbearance and hoped his reading of one of his father's sermons might in some measure mitigate their disappointment. He then announced the hymn and sat, white and unhappy-looking, during its rendition. The people did not join in the hymn. They were not as a

whole familiar with that class of music. But the hymn was well sung nevertheless. Sylvia, looking over the low top of the organ, saw the eyes of Wully McNab's mother suffused with tears, and Mr. McNab's lips twitch strangely at the corners.

Robert Clyde's prayer followed the hymn. It was short and impressive. It asked God to help a boy who was not in the habit of praying in public; who had never before addressed any kind of meeting, to carry this service through with the dignity and solemnity which belonged to the place and to the time. After Gene McNab's beautiful solo, he rose again and slipped his father's sermon under the lid of the open Bible, and announced that since coming into the church he had changed his mind about reading it.

"I have it here," he said, smiling, "to fall back upon in case I find it impossible to say what I wish to say. But the sermon is upon a text which may be considered at some future time, while that which I wish to say must be said now — today — or not at all.

"I cannot tell you where to look for my text, for I do not know where it is to be found. I heard it upon the lips of one who was doing willingly her share of the work of the world.

" ' Make ready thy spindle and distaff,
And God will furnish the flax.' "

Mr. McNab stirred uneasily in his pew, fumbling for a handkerchief with which to mop his brow. He evi-

dently feared a personal attack, but there was no hint of anything of the kind. The sermon was a vivid, unhackneyed appeal to youth to array itself on the side of good.

"In the past I have not done what I now ask you to do," continued the speaker — "what I propose to try to do in the future. I left it to others to carry on the work of the world — to do the difficult tasks while I hunted amusement. Suddenly this emergency arose and I realized that I, Bob Clyde, must do something which I feared to do; I must do it, or it must remain forever undone. I said, 'I can't do it; I'm not a minister — I am not even a professor of religion. It would do more harm than good for me to speak to those people. There will be old men present who will have known life as I have had no time to know it; they will resent my speaking to them; there will be young men there who will say, "Bob Clyde, preaching to us? Why, he is no better than he should be himself. What authority has he to advise us!"' "

"Then I looked into my own heart and said: 'If this last accusation is true, Bob Clyde, something is wrong. You are shirking your part of the world's work. You should have been more nearly ready for this unexpected task which has been thrust upon you!'

"It required this demand to waken me — to jar me out of my self-complacent sloth. There was little excuse for me — a minister's son — surrounded by schol-

arly and religious influences, nurtured and taught and looked after by the best of fathers — oh, there was no excuse at all for me. I should have been more nearly ready. And if the words I speak to you today do nobody else any good know this: They have made me less a shirk and less a traitor. I cannot go back to my old-time indolence, for my sense of obligation has been awakened. I must stand ready to do my share of the world's work else I might better never have been born. Not as a minister; I shall in all probability never stand before a congregation again, but in whatever walk of life I may find myself, I am one of the spinners and weavers of God's great fabric. To me has been intrusted the spindle and the distaff for which no one else is responsible. It is my place to be ready to labor for the betterment of the world, leaving the results to Him.

“ You older men have either your regrets to make you sad, or your satisfaction in well-lived lives to gladden you; it is we boys and girls who still have our choice to make — our chance before us.”

From her perch behind the organ Sylvia saw “ Sharley ” Wohoskey with mouth dropping open and eyes bulging in the intensity with which he drank in the speaker's words. She noted the absorption of the Anderson boys. Even Bartholomew Vonvolkenberg, dense, slow of comprehension, with his red neckerchief askew until the knot of it was where the knot would have been if he were going to be hanged, seemed

wholly alive to the meaning of the message, as he would not have been alive to the Reverend Mr. Clyde's more polished and shapely discourse. It was the youth of the speaker, the personal appeal of the theme, which caught and held his interest to the end.

Wully McNab's anthem book slipped from his knee and fell to the floor with a bang. He stooped for it and came up with a flushed face.

After the closing anthem and the benediction, Mr. McNab came slowly to his feet and faced the congregation.

"I'd like to say," he began, "that there isn't a pairson in the house more glad to see this chairch bein' used for its legitimate purpose than I am." In his embarrassed earnestness his Scotch extraction became more than usually apparent in the roll of his r's, and the pinch of his vowels. "I admit I did intend takin' it over for my own uses accordin' to my father's wull. 'Most ten years it stood rottin' in r-r-rain an' sun, the land aboot it goin' to rag- an' mayweed. But now that you Rosedale folk have seen fit to make a stir-r-r, an' open it again to the singin' o' hymns, an' the preachin' o' the Word, I'm wullin' to — sort of do my shaire with the gettin' ready of the tools for the work. My faither gev the ground and helped to build the chairch, an' if you Rosedale folk are a mind to use the chairch, I'll put a new platform to it, pent it, get a new or-r-gan, some lights, an' such small fixin's as the

women folk seem to think necessary." He sat down suddenly and there was a murmur that was almost applause as the people rose to go.

"Flax! Flax! The flax is just rolling in!" declared young Wully, ostentatiously stacking the hymn-books. "Just see what you've done to poor dad's hens, Sylvia." And then he turned to Mr. Pudney. "Choir practice at seven sharp, Mr. Pudney. We'll probably have electricity in the church by that time. Now that dad's really started to work his spindle and distaff he'll make a noise with 'em like a whole woolen mill. Dad's like me, he never does things by halves. When he was mean he was real good and mean, but now that Bob Clyde has him faced about in the opposite direction, he'll make good speed, I shouldn't wonder. Farewell, Mary Ann, until Friday night, and if you have any dogs to throw on the open market, why let me know."

Sylvia was still looking at the people standing in groups or passing out of the church, when Gene whispered, "Look at your mother; she has an expression on her face as if an angel's wing had just brushed her cheek."

Sylvia looked, and smiled, and as she did so she caught a gleam of tender pride in her grandmother's eyes, and knew that the wing Gene spoke of had even fanned away some of the disguising dust of sternness from that lean old face.

CHAPTER VIII

In winter the Drews abandoned the shed-room kitchen at the west and carried on their numerous activities in the warmer part of the house. Consequently the living-room, although large, did not appear so, with the kitchen table, cupboard, and range added to its regulation dining-room equipment. The house was old, having been built away back in the pioneer days, which accounted for its sturdy stone construction, and the great fireplace which filled most of the western end of the house proper. This fireplace — a nice dark cave behind the range — was the winter Mecca of the dogs. As often as Grandmother's vigilance lapsed two bundles of yellow hair might be seen bulging from behind the range, while knowing doggish eyes watched for the first flourish of Grandmother's broom. Grandfather let the dogs in — surreptitiously — Sylvia and Merry Andrew were both very blind where dogs were concerned, especially on a cold, stormy day; and even Mother, who tried to be law-abiding, fell from grace now and then. When Grandmother really did tolerate their presence it was the sign of extreme weather without. She said a family which owned two dogs the size of yearling calves might well

be expected to stable the stock behind the kitchen stove. It would be of a piece with the rest of Merry Andrew's foolishness. She considered that the Lord had intended dogs to live out of doors; had furnished them coats with which to withstand cold, and Grandfather had wasted time and lumber building a dog-kennel. Besides there were the barn and the tool-house; so out they went.

It was on one of these trying winter days while Mother washed the breakfast dishes, and Grandmother, over by the north window, mended the family stockings, that Sylvia, making doughnuts by the south window, saw Merry Andrew and the dogs coming full gallop from the barn. Merry Andrew did a big half of the chores nowadays, as Grandfather kept no help during the winter months and every year it grew harder for him to do the work alone.

The wind was from the north, but it seemed to take a fiendish delight in sweeping the snow across the path to the barn and banking it against the unprotected southern doors of the old stone house. The sun was dazzling, and out across the fields in the direction of the McNabs' place the snow rose and fell and rose again, like waves at sea.

It was Saturday, and Sylvia was wondering a little wistfully if the minister would be able to get through the drifts tomorrow. So far he had not failed, but the worst snow storm of the winter was now being

followed by the bitterest wind. The roads were full and with a sigh Sylvia acknowledged the hopelessness of seeing any one of her three music scholars, who took their lessons on Saturdays.

It was too bad. It would do the pupils no good to miss their lessons, and it would certainly work a hardship on the Drews to miss the dollar and a half which the lessons brought. Times were hard with them these days. It took all Grandfather Drew could scrape together in the fall to pay the taxes, the interest on the mortgage, and to buy wood for the long hard winter. In fact, he had come short this fall of doing even this; so that in the spring, in place of the satisfaction which comes from knowing that progress has been made if ever so little, there would be, instead, a perfectly fresh debt to worry him. The small salary Sylvia received as organist in the church, and the Saturday music scholars, had served to furnish the girls with their modest outfit of clothes.

"Heard the news?" demanded Merry Andrew, opening the outside door just far enough to admit her glowing face. "The big boys have turned the teacher out of school! She's gone home, trunk and all, and there is nothing left in the McNab district but insurrection, and insubordination and incompatibility and all the other ins!"

"Either come in or shut the door!" called Grandmother sharply. "You are letting all the heat out of

the house and all the snow in! And if you are coming in, stamp the snow off your feet. I should think a woman grown, like you, would remember to do that, without being told."

"I wasn't coming in; I'm not through at the barn," replied Merry Andrew, "but I thought you'd want to hear the news."

Sylvia paused with a doughnut poised above the kettle of lard on the stove, and Mother commanded Merry Andrew to "come on in and tell us about it."

"Oh do!" seconded Sylvia, and Merry Andrew responded to the invitation. She opened the door, letting in a furious blast of snow-laden wind and the dogs, who scurried into obscurity behind the stove. On their way, however, they were each moved to execute a showery shake of their great-coats, spattering the clean floor with snow and filling the room with dampness and confusion.

Grandmother, at her darning over by the north window, poised a stockinged hand and shivered, not so much with cold as with disapprobation. But in view of what was going on outside she held her peace.

"My, but it smells good in here!" declared Merry Andrew, drawing off her rubber boots and wiggling a pair of stubby little moccasins close to the stove.

"Smells good!" repeated Grandmother sarcastically; "you must be fond of the smell of drying dog fur."

"They haven't begun to dry to that extent yet," protested Merry Andrew, investigating Twoboy's back with a moccasined toe. "And do please let them stay until I go out again. I'm going right away."

With her back to her grandmother she wigwagged a signal for doughnuts to Sylvia, who responded surreptitiously with two.

"Now go on with the news," urged Sylvia. But Merry Andrew procrastinated, as one will, when in possession of an unusually rich bit of gossip.

"Do you know it is a horrible day outside? Wind right from the north, too. Listen to it wheezing through the oak tree. It might blow that old tree over on to the house and smash it."

Involuntarily Grandmother glanced out at the trunk of the great tree whose branches above whined in the wind. Sylvia caught a glimpse of a flying fragment of doughnut disappearing somewhere behind the stove.

"There is a bank out in the road right in front of our house which looks to me as if it wouldn't melt before the Fourth of July, and getting bigger every minute."

Grandmother craned a wiry neck. She had a horror of banking snow, and no one to shovel it save an old man and a flyaway girl. The bank was there, and as Merry Andrew had asserted, growing every moment. Two doughnut flights, attended by snapping of canine jaws, took place during Grandmother's investigation

of the road. Four hopeful, waggish eyes peered from behind the stove.

"What about the fuss at school?" prompted Mother, "and how did you hear of it?"

"Oh, Mr. Pudney went wallowing by just now on his way to the Corners. He called to Grandfather, and Grandfather waded out to the road to hear about it. Isn't it queer! Mr. Pudney is the kind of man who catches things coming and going. Because of this snow he had to go to the Corners; if it had been a flood he would have had to make Bendon. It's lower in that direction and he would have stood a better chance of being mired. It always thunders and lightens the hardest when Pudney is at his milking; if there comes a swinger of a hot day in June you look over into that cup-shaped meadow of his, where never a breeze can get in, and there you'll find Pudney sweating and haying."

"You have a bad habit, Mary Ann, of wandering when you start to tell anything," said Grandmother. (Merry Andrew signaled for more doughnuts. Sylvia only smiled and shook her head. She had seen the reckless expenditure of provision. But Mother innocently responded to the call and the recklessness went on.) "Finish your news about the school; although it makes little difference to us — we have no one attending. I am glad your grandfather refused to go on the board."

"Oh, did they want Grandfather on the board?" asked Merry Andrew in surprise.

Grandmother stirred uneasily. She would not lie. On the other hand, what was the use of a granddaughter being so pertinacious! Why could not Mary Ann assume, with other polite listeners, that Grandfather had been tendered a place on the school board and had refused it?

"Go on with your story!" she commanded.

"Mr. Pudney lays it all to the Pierce boy."

"Of course," assented all three of the listeners together.

"It seems that little Al Pierce got soaked with a snowball and was pretty badly hurt. At first it was supposed to be one of the Button boys who threw the ball, and Miss Murdock punished him; or tried to. Then it turned out that it wasn't the Button boy at all who hurt little Al Pierce. Mr. Pudney says they don't know what boy really did it, but I wouldn't be afraid to bet — if I were a betting person — that I could lay my hand on the head of the boy who did throw the snowball and not go very far beyond that drift out there in the road either."

"You think it was Earl Pudney?" asked Sylvia, interested.

"I just know it was."

"You don't know anything of the sort," said Grandmother severely, "and you might be in better business

than running down your nearest neighbor. And — What are you doing! — feeding those dogs doughnuts? Put them out! Put them out this minute! If your mother upholds you in such wastefulness I shan't! The idea!"

Like many before them, Boy and Twoboy had spoiled their own fortunes by greediness. In order to be near the source of supplies they had emerged from their place of retirement to lay coaxing muzzles upon their benefactress's knee.

"Well — Grandmother — well!" grumbled the unrepentant Merry Andrew, "give me time to get my boots on and we'll hike; won't we, boys? Who wants doughnuts anyway!" They scratched through the door as a gust of wind brought round an extra load of snow. A portion of it swept indoors.

"If your grandfather had built a storm-house in place of a dog-house he would have worked to a better end," remarked Grandmother to Sylvia. Then the door flew open again and Merry Andrew called out excitedly:

"Ship ahoy from the sou'-sou'-west! From the direction of McNab's! I believe Mrs. McNab is coming to make a call!" Then she banged the door and was gone for good.

Sylvia and her mother laughed at the idea of the stout little Mrs. McNab wading through such roads to make a call, but they both leaned across the table to

peer in the direction indicated. Grandmother came also, and all three could plainly see a feminine figure battling bravely against the wind. Grandmother was the first to identify it.

"It's Gene, and she's coming here! Go straight and light a fire in the parlor. Hurry!"

Sylvia went willingly. Now if any of the three music pupils should happen to brave the storm, at least the piano keys would not quite freeze their fingers.

When Miss McNab, laughing and gasping, reached the back door it swung open hospitably to receive her, and she was borne through the living-room and hall into the newly-warmed parlor so rapidly that she scarcely caught a whiff of the doughnuts.

"Cold!" she gasped, "Oh no, Mrs. Drew! I'm reeking with perspiration! I've been working hard, I'd have you know. Why, once I really thought I'd have to give up and flounder back home. I don't think I have ever walked through such drifts before."

"You must stay all night," cooed Grandmother, and Mother slipped around and opened the door of the spare bedroom to let in the heat gradually. But Miss McNab scoffed at the invitation.

"At least you must stay to dinner," persisted Grandmother.

"No, I must get back as soon as possible — before father finds I am gone. You must know, Mrs. Drew, that nothing short of desperation would drive me to

face that field of snow on such a day — Just a moment — until I catch my breath!”

Miss McNab laughed and sank back into the cretonne-covered rocking-chair. Against its tan and yellow roses her black hair took on a bluish luster, and her skin lost something of its sallow tint. She appeared very lovely to Sylvia, who, since their year together in the church choir, had come to like instead of fear her. In spite of her liking, however, Sylvia could not altogether be rid of the familiar tremor when her friend's eyes wandered over those floral patterns in the carpet, and the perfectly ugly Nottingham window-curtains.

“Did you know that Miss Murdock had given up the school?” Gene began abruptly.

“Mr. Pudney told Grandfather just a little while ago.”

“I think it is a hard school to manage,” commented Grandmother politely.

“Indeed it is!” owned Gene, “and father suggests that I take Miss Murdock's place for the rest of the term. In fact, he insists upon it. He says it would be all sorts of disgrace to have it go abroad that the school in the McNab district was closed because no one could manage it. He says he will give me a hundred dollars a month and stand behind me in the matter of disciplining the school.”

Sylvia's heart sank. She anticipated what was com-

ing next. All her life she had dreaded being forced to teach in that barren old schoolhouse with its eight staring windows, its one door, its chimney awry from the day it was built; with its pile of cord-wood by the door and its bleak road stretching away to the north and to the south. She hated the very idea of teaching school. With music it was different: You had your one pupil to whom you were imparting a delightful art; the one mind to influence and direct. A school-room was a storm center, always. You taught and fought simultaneously. It was too much!

"I wouldn't take the school — not for two hundred dollars a month," went on Gene. "But I didn't tell father so; not flatly. I told him I would consider the matter. He was very peremptory. You know father's way. He said there was little time to consider, for either I, or somebody else, must open that school Monday morning."

Gene paused and sat up straight in the calico chair. Sylvia kept silent, but Grandmother gave voice to a sympathetic murmur which meant nothing beyond admiration for the daughter of a McNab. She had not caught the drift of the matter and was far from seeing any connection between Gene's stormy visit and the troubles of District Number 3, or "McNab's School," as it was usually called.

"It has always been a rough school," continued Gene. "It was rough in my day, and — I'm afraid —

rougher in Wully's. Although," she hastened to add, "I don't believe Wully's mischief was a vicious or vindictive mischief like that of some who attend now."

"No, no, not at all!" said Grandmother.

Gene acknowledged the older woman's kindness by a glance, but turned to Sylvia for confirmation.

"Was it, Sylvia? You ought to know; you went to school when Wully did."

Sylvia smiled.

"I used to wonder whatever I should do if I were obliged to be Wully McNab's teacher."

Gene's face fell. She sighed.

"I presume," she owned, "our own brothers and sisters and — any who are dear — appear in a very different light to us than to others. And I admit that Wully has been — unfortunate in college. But mother thinks that is due to the fact of his having chanced upon fussy and over-particular professors —"

"Certainly!" chorused Grandmother. Gene rewarded her again, but looked straight at Sylvia for support of her theory. Not receiving it, she laughed.

"I don't care! He has always been a sweet brother to me and always will be, Sylvia Drew; and it's no matter what you think! I know him better than you do, if you did go to school with him."

"And when it comes to unmanageableness, we don't have to go away from home," declared Grandmother. Sylvia flushed.

"We're all bad enough," she owned.

"I'm not talking about you, and you know it," said Grandmother.

"Then if it is Merry Andrew, there is some excuse for her. She has so little that other girls have — hard work — boy's — yes, man's work! And no play —"

"Ah, ha! Now the shoe is on the other foot!" triumphed Grandmother. "When do you expect Wully home?"

"His vacation is in March, but — we have sort of — fallen into the habit of expecting Wully rather — unexpectedly, you know."

The girls laughed together, and Gene rose to go, coming to her real errand abruptly and baldly at the last, even as her father would have done.

"I want you to take the school, Sylvia, and do the best you can with it. If my wish counts for anything, father's offer holds good to you — a hundred dollars a month (the increase out of his own pocket, and a private matter, you understand) and his influence back of you to maintain order. And still back of that, twenty-five dollars a month more; which must be strictly between ourselves."

There was nothing to be said. Sylvia stood silent — overwhelmed, while Grandmother joyfully accepted on her behalf. There was the money with which to pick up that teasing little debt of Grandfather's; the money for the spring hired man; the money for those

last cords of stove-wood which were always so hard to come by, and the money to work them up into stove length.

"It will not be money earned easily," warned Gene, addressing Grandmother, not Sylvia.

"No," said Sylvia desperately, "and it is not likely that I shall be able to stick it out during the whole term. I will do my best. But oh, you don't know how I dread and fear it!"

Gene stood conscience-smitten.

"If you feel that way about it, Sylvia —"

"Tut, tut!" said Grandmother. "Think how you can help your grandfather with your salary!"

"Yes, yes," trembled Sylvia, "I don't want to be one of the shirks of the world. I want to be ready to shoulder my share of the hard work," and then for Grandmother's benefit added with defiance, "as Merry Andrew always is."

When Gene McNab had gone Sylvia went about in a miserable daze setting the table for dinner. Mother's eyes followed her anxiously — pityingly; but there was no chance to talk things over. Grandmother was lamenting the fact that they had not been able to persuade Gene to stay for dinner. That Sylvia stood pledged to a dreaded and hazardous task was a secondary matter. Presently Grandfather, Merry Andrew, and both dogs arrived from the barn, stamping and shaking themselves free from the powdery snow.

"Well, Sylvia is in for a strenuous winter," announced Mother.

"How is that?" asked Grandfather, hanging up his hat.

"She has promised Gene McNab to be her substitute. She is going to take the school."

"Heaven's high tower!" exclaimed Merry Andrew, who had been reading Hardy. "Why, Sylvia Drew, are you crazy? Grandfather, Sylvia can't teach that school! Why don't you put a stop to it!"

"Mr. McNab has promised to stand behind Sylvia —" began Grandmother.

"Mr. McNab stand behind Sylvia!" raged Merry Andrew. "Why, the farther off Mr. McNab stands the better! It's the Pudneys — Dorothy and Earl — who have been raising hob in the school, and if they found out Mr. McNab was standing behind Sylvia, or beside Sylvia, or anywhere near Sylvia, they'd be worse than ever! They don't love the McNabs as — as —"

"Mary Ann!" warned Grandfather.

"There, there!" soothed Mother, passing a calming hand over the ruffled hair. And Merry Andrew ended:

"— as some folks do! If anybody belonging to this family must teach that school I am the one to tackle it!"

"You!" snorted Grandmother. "You haven't enough education yourself to teach others."

"You don't need education in District Number 3," declared Merry Andrew, "you need muscle and grit! You don't need to be a teacher; you must be a scrapper — that's all! I am that, and Sylvia isn't! There are just two scrappers in this family; me and —"

"Merry Andrew!" warned Grandfather and Sylvia and Mother all together.

"Oh, don't stop her," said Grandmother grimly. "Let her go on! She has no reverence for gray hairs!"

"— And that's me and Twoboy! We are fighters!" finished Merry Andrew, glaring at her grandmother.

Whether because of her perturbation, or her preliminary luncheon of doughnuts, Merry Andrew's appetite failed her in the middle of her meal, and with a hardly audible "Excuse me" in the direction of her grandmother she flung away from the table and stood glowering at the drifting snow from the north window. A moment later she called out excitedly:

"There is a team down below Pudney's! They are breaking the road! I'll bet you it is somebody from Bendon breaking through so the minister can get out here tomorrow! Yes — it is — it is Robert Clyde and somebody else, and they are digging! It won't do 'em any good — with this wind it will fill right up again. There is a girl with them and — who is the other man? Good gracious! It is —" She turned and stuffed her apron into her mouth — "It is — Wully McNab!

They're waving at us!" She flapped her apron wildly.

Presently the team was turning in at the east of the house. The Drew family buzzed out of the back door to welcome them. The dogs whirled and cavorted about the tired horses' feet.

"We've managed to get through, but it's like sticking your finger into a pan of water and then pulling it out and looking for the hole. Isn't this a whale of a blow?" called out Robert Clyde. "Let me introduce you to my friend, Mr. McNab, late of Wisconsin University."

Wully was helping out Aggie Brown, Sylvia's eldest music pupil, whom they had overtaken floundering towards her lesson. He shook hands all around, grinning a bit sheepishly. They all poured into the living-room, which immediately became a caldron of youth and hilarity and collie dogs. Grandmother greeted Wully.

"Gene has just gone home across lots," she told him.

"Gene? What in the name of the seven seas was she doing over here on such a day as this?" demanded Wully.

"Came over to wish old District Number Three on to Sylvia," said Merry Andrew. "Dorothy and Earl Pudney and Liz Wood and a few more brave spirits turned poor meek little Miss Murdock out, and now Sylvia is elected to take a whirl at it."

"I've a mind to begin school again," declared Wully, "take my old desk once more — that one by the door

with the beautiful bas relief of Jim Stanley carved on the top — yes-s-s, that's my work; done that winter that Jim taught our school. Splendid likeness of Jim, if I do say it. All the boys thought so, too. Last work I ever did at District Number Three. It was easier than it looks. Stanley, you may remember, had wide, wandering ears, and one wisp of hair which refused to associate with its fellows, standing up alone on his crown. It wasn't at all bad-looking on his head, but somehow in the drawing — or rather, the cut — it came out so vividly — that and the ears — that everybody laughed. There is no title to the work. I carved not a line and I raised not a stone, but Jim recognized his portrait the moment he came down where I was at work. He excused me for the rest of the term."

"Did he lay it up against you?" asked Bob Clyde.

"No, oh no; but he told father, and it was father who laid it up against me — the buggy-whip — in the barn! Bur-r-r-r! I was warmer than I am this minute! Oh, father took such things in time, I can tell you! I often think if it had not been for father's bringing-up I might not be what I am today."

"Well, I think —" began Merry Andrew.

"Yes, yes, we all know what you think, dear," Wully interrupted her to say. "But I do really wish you would let me come to your school, Sylvia; to see if I couldn't manage to stick through one whole term. I never have yet."

"Oh, goody, goody!" cooed Aggie Brown. "Are you really going to teach our school, Miss Drew? I'm so glad! The big boys are the meanest —"

"Which big boys?" demanded Bob Clyde so abruptly that Aggie started.

"Why, Pete Swanson —"

"Pete Swanson! You don't mean to say that Pete Swanson is going to district school yet!" exclaimed Wully. "Why, he went to school when I did. Pete's education must be sticking to the shell even worse than mine."

"And George Stone," went on Aggie.

"Another!" said Wully. "Thank you, I don't care if I do have a doughnut, Mrs. Drew. Breaking roads in company with a minister's son is frightfully exhausting. They are brought up, you see, to the idea that farmer lads like me are designed by Providence to do the lifting, while they —"

"Dry up, Wully, while I get the rest of this school census," admonished Robert.

"Let me see-e-e —," reflected Aggie, "where did I leave off — Oh, yes; there's that horrid Earl Pudney. He hectors all the little boys, and the middling-sized boys — mother took my brother Ray out of school. She was afraid Earl Pudney would blind him with snowballs. There's William and Sanderson Anderson, and Gabe Peters and the Button boys —"

"Are they large — the Buttons?" inquired Wully,

measuring a circle with the thumb and forefinger of the hand not encumbered with doughnut. "They weren't trimming with 'em when I was on the rollcall of Number 3. We had Loops, I remember —"

"And the big girls," went on Aggie, "are almost worse than the big boys. Hilda Swanson —"

"I remember Hilda. White hair, little rosebud mouth and red rims around her eyes."

"She's awful pretty now," witnessed Aggie, "and so is Lizzie Wood."

"That's right; tell us about the big girls. They are so much more interesting than the big boys. Are you one of them, Aggie?"

"No; I am one of the betweenes. But I shall be one next year. So will Kate Anderson and Alma Wohoskey. There are ten little girls, three betweenes, and three big girls; the rest are boys."

"There will be four big girls!" announced Merry Andrew sententiously.

"Nonsense!" said Grandmother, but Mother said never a word.

Aggie described the family feud between the Metzlauffs and Buttons, and the still more serious one between the Pierces and the Pudneys.

"If they annoy you kill 'em off," advised Wully. "That is why the committee who selected the site for the schoolhouse built it next to the cemetery. They expected such emergencies to arise. Nice little row of

Buttonholes close to the fence — and in the case of the Pierces and Pudneys, tie the Pierces and let Dorothy sing —”

“Wully, Wully!” remonstrated Grandmother, “you are carrying your joking too far.”

“Yes,” said Mother, “Dorothy is not the worst singer in the world.”

“You are right, Mrs. Drew,” owned Wully frankly, and immediately spoiled his retraction by adding, “Her mother takes the blue ribbon in that class.”

“Hush!” warned Sylvia with a covert nod at the tittering Aggie Brown. “You know that will go right back to the Pudneys, and won’t help to establish friendly relations between them and the McNabs to any great extent. But your fooling has given me an idea: I’ll get up a school exhibition. Perhaps in that way I may be able to interest the little ones, the ‘betweens,’ as Aggie calls them, and even some of the big ones.”

“Hear that, Bob? Sylvia wants you to write a play for the school.”

“Oh do!” seconded Sylvia, although she had not thought of such a thing before. “Something with a good part for everybody!”

“Sort of a miracle play, it would have to be,” chor-tled Wully.

“Play ‘Midsummer Night’s Dream,’ and get Wully

to take the part of Bottom. It would fit him down to the ground," suggested Bob.

"I shall be happy to attempt the part," promised Wully, "if I can get the make-up. Will you lend me your head, Bob?"

The Drews laughed in chorus, and Aggie also, although she did not understand the joke. She knew, however, that it must be funny if Wully McNab cracked it. Robert grinned sheepishly.

"I'll talk with you about the play tomorrow, Sylvia," he promised as the boys prepared to go. They would proceed with their road-breaking as far as the church, where Robert would turn back, picking up Aggie on his way, while Wully would flounder through the drifts across-lots to "surprise father."

After Aggie had finished her lesson, been warmed, bundled, and packed into Bob Clyde's cutter for her homeward "lift," Mother came tiptoeing into the parlor where Sylvia stood watching the departure.

"I'm afraid we shall have a fuss," whispered Mother gloomily. "Grandmother says she shall set her foot right down on her going."

Sylvia understood who Mother meant, and where *she* was not to go.

"We must side with Grandmother in this," said Sylvia. "She is in the right of it. It would only make my task the harder to have Merry Andrew in the

mixup. She believes in force; I believe in diplomacy. Merry Andrew can throw a snowball swifter and surer than I can; she can run faster and fight harder. But she can neither run nor throw nor fight as well as can Pete Swanson or Earl Pudney. That is their own game and they will beat her at it. And I can't bear to see my gay little sister vanquished —" Sylvia paused, startled as the spare bedroom door slowly opened and out walked the little sister, who was supposed to be in the barn helping with the early chores.

"I was just sure you would have this talk if you got the chance," she giggled, "and I was bound to be to it. I want to state right here that you two need not connive with Grandmother, for I am going to school! I am still of school age —"

"But, Merry Andrew," protested Sylvia, "you haven't been going for the last two years —"

"I know it. I didn't think the last teachers could teach me anything."

"What do you expect to learn of the new teacher?" demanded Sylvia.

"Diplomacy," answered Merry Andrew promptly. "I am deficient in it. And you, Mother, will be obliged to take a short course in higher milking. You are proficient in the rudimentary branches, of course. You know how to balance yourself on a three-legged stool, softly murmur 'So, boss!' and pull a quart or so of

milk from a normal cow; but when it comes to milking Ambrosia you have to be proficient in the higher branches, or you will find yourself *in* the higher branches — of the plumbtree there in the cow-yard!"

Merry Andrew referred to a new acquisition to the barnyard family which she had named Ambrosia, but which Grandfather called "Swayback."

"Grandfather can't milk her — poor dear old thing — I mean Ambrosia, not Grandfather — Ambrosia's heifer days must have been spent under the manipulations of some hideous, horny-handed old hired man whose method with cows was kicking and swearing; and she can't seem to get used to any other method — diplomacy, for instance. She has to be sworn at before she will stand still —"

"Merry Andrew!" gasped Mother, "you don't mean that!"

"Of course I do — I have to! I use grape-juice profanity. Poor old Ambrosia has never been to school. She doesn't know the difference if the words sound like those she was brought up on. I grab my pail and yell, 'Git over there! You Dardanelles, De-deagatch, Saloniki bovine, you!' then I ram my head into her side and begin with the milking. I have to hurry, too. For if you give her time to let her mind wander back to that cruel old hired man, first you know you hear something rattle, and you'll be lying on y^r ar

back with your shoes sticking straight up, and there in the air, flying around like a Zeppelin, will be your milk-pail!"

Sylvia and her mother tried to make their appreciation of Merry Andrew's recital as noiseless as possible.

"And you would doom Mother to such dangers?" gurgled Sylvia, wiping her eyes.

"I've thought it all out," answered Merry Andrew solemnly. "I shall have to get up early enough to do Ambrosia before I go mornings, and again after I get home nights. For go I will and nobody shall stop me! How much are you going to get a month, Sylvia?"

"You couldn't guess if you tried all night," triumphed Sylvia. "One hundred and twenty-five dollars a month!"

"What? One hun — Sylvia, you're stringing me!"

"No, that is to be my salary."

"Why, Sylvia Drew! One hundred and twenty-five dollars a month for four months is —"

"But wait — I may not be able to stand it the whole term through."

"You must — you shall! Why, it will pay the interest on the mortgage, buy a nice new hired man for spring — Poor old Grandfather! why, it will be like taking a rock right off the top of his battered old felt hat!"

Mother's eyes shone; so did Sylvia's. Merry Andrew jumped up and dragged the two to their feet. They joined hands and began to whirl in a fantastic, bacchanalian dance. Down clattered the shovel and the poker, and bang went a heavy music book from the corner of the piano; over went a haircloth chair, at which Merry Andrew prudently "faded" into the parlor bedroom whence she had so suddenly appeared.

Grandmother opened the door and demanded to know what was the matter. Almost inarticulately Sylvia owned that a book had fallen from the piano. Grandmother picked up the book, the shovel, the poker — the chair.

"Nice silly business!" she commented. Then in a voice like hardened steel she inquired, "Daughter-in-law, are you going to get supper, or must I do it?"

"Oh, I am coming right away," murmured Mother contritely, and followed her into the kitchen.

Sylvia lingered to peep into the parlor bedroom. It was as well that Grandmother had not done so; for although there was no girl in there, the window was open and snow blowing in upon the best bedroom carpet.

CHAPTER IX

Monday morning Sylvia went to her task with more courage than she could have thought possible Saturday. Perhaps Mr. Clyde's sermon had something to do with this. His text had courage for the central thought. Success did not always follow courage to do, he said. Success was a secondary matter, after all. The willingness to make the sacrifice—that was the main thing. Perhaps it was Bob Clyde's interview with her after church, in which he outlined a scheme for a grand entertainment—a sort of historical pageant which might be produced in the church. He had taken part in a show of that kind in college and he was quite sure he could adapt it to whatever number of the faithful might remain at the end of the school term.

For the boys there would be easily-produced costumes, made up largely of cotton batting wigs and long stockings, and for the girls flowered calico, puffs, powder-patches and so on. He even hoped his father would allow the "stately minuet" to be performed during the entertainment. Wully McNab had promised to do everything he could to help the cause along; unobtrusively, of course—almost surreptitiously, in fact, for the less the McNabs appeared in the matter

the better. To a Pudney, a McNab was almost as poisonous as a Pierce.

Bob had pressed him to take the leading part in the drama — that of George Washington; but Wully had brought forth very good reasons why such an arrangement would not be practical, the strongest being that his father had promised him a term or two in a military school to see if that “wouldn’t thr-r-r-m um up!” Consequently he might not be with them when the show was pulled off.

The other reason, as Wully stated it, was that he lacked the facial advantages which the part demanded. In order to be a candidate he considered that he should have to submit to some “good hitter giving him a biff under his chops in order to knock his rather pointed chin and rosebud mouth into the square and straight-across of the national hero.” But in any humble capacity — curtain-puller, wig-maker, property man or call-boy — he would stand pat.

Sylvia intended to play up this entertainment to its full value. The question was, whether to mention it at the outset — this very morning, or wait until matters settled into some sort of routine.

The wind was still high, and the crossroads drifted full when, with a beating heart, she set out for the scene of battle. She was alone, for Merry Andrew had lingered to milk Ambrosia before getting ready.

The schoolhouse, gaunt and bare and weather-worn,

stood with its blind gable to the road, looking more forbidding than it ever had before; even upon that never-to-be-forgotten occasion when Miss Dean, a former teacher, had promised Merry Andrew a whipping the next morning. Sylvia remembered that, although she herself had suffered cruelly, Merry Andrew had taken the punishment stoically, as she took Grandmother's doses of sulphur and molasses; it was unpleasant, inevitable, but, possibly, beneficial.

A group of big boys stood about the platform hunching shoulders against the cold. Sylvia hurried her steps.

Among those who waited she recognized burly Pete Swanson, a man grown; Gabe Peters, George Stone, the Anderson boys. A moment later the entire brigade of Metzlauffs and Buttons appeared, even at this early hour, carrying on the never-ending family feud. Earl Pudney, the front and chief of all offenders, had not yet arrived. Perhaps he would not come at all. Sylvia hoped that he would not.

"Good morning, boys," she called out briskly, as she approached the school-house. "Pretty cold, isn't it? I wonder if some of you will build a fire for me?"

No one responded, but after a moment's hesitation the big Sanderson boy came in and began to help with the fire. Through the open door a hard-packed snowball whizzed, shattered against the stove and scattered

in fragments over the floor. Sylvia patiently closed the door.

"The boys didn't realize that the door was open," she said.

"I guess they realized it all right," returned the Sanderson boy dryly.

The door opened far enough to admit the red woolen cap and pop eyes of the oldest Button boy.

"Hello, Grandma Sanderson! Are you buildin' your morning fire?" he drawled.

"Awh, shut yer mouth!" returned young Sanderson; but his face was very red, and he was already half sorry for his gallantry in helping the teacher.

A sharp fusillade of snowballs battered the front of the building. The door opened again disclosing a queer little face, bulging eyes set far apart in a flat red plateau, a negligible hillock of a nose above a mouth shaped like an inverted horseshoe. Out of the mouth came a resounding oath delivered with a strong Slavic accent.

"Who was that?" asked Sylvia, startled.

"Awh, Charley Wohoskey! But it is Earl Pudney who is puttin' him up!"

Sylvia turned to the desk for the bell, but found none.

"Where is the bell?" she asked.

"The boys carried it off, I guess," returned Bill San-

derson, still piling in stove-wood. "Earl Pudney said it made too much noise. There, I guess your fire is all right."

"I'm — I'm just as much obliged as I can be," faltered Sylvia, following William toward the door, where he contemplated a quick escape. "William," she added, and her voice trembled a little, "I hope you and your brother and sister are going to stand by the school. It — is going to be a hard job for me, I am afraid."

"You bet it is!" owned William.

"Well, will you Andersons be on my side, William?"

William grinned, grew redder and delayed his answer. If he had possessed the language with which to clothe his thought he would have told Sylvia that she was asking a good deal of him. But Sylvia did not need his assurance.

"I'm going to stick, William," she added in a tense voice. "Will you help me?"

The door burst open and a mass of small children came surging in under a dangerous fire of snowballs. William made his escape, but flung a promise over his shoulder as he disappeared.

"You bet I will!"

Sylvia felt that she had taken a trench; now to hold it!

She greeted the children, the Franklins, Bengie,

Mary, and Solomon, the baby (the last-named not yet of school age, but sent to relieve his mother of maternal cares); Mitty and Alma and "Yennie" Wohoskey (Charley after his late performance lingered outside with his chief), the little Smith girls, all bathed and clothed and beribboned as well-to-do children should be; Pete and Mame Kelly, Julie Spiervogle, chubby and kissable and willing to be good with half a chance. Sylvia smiled and joked and helped to peel coat-sleeves from arms which persisted in sticking to them because of an eternal tendency to outgrow clothing. Her heart went out to these little helpless folk who looked up at her with eager, hopeful eyes, to be taken care of, to be protected, to be taught. What a pleasure it would be if it were not for that other element; that unruly clique which did not need protection and did not care to be taught!

Outside there was the sound of growing conflict. It must be stopped. Sylvia took up the ruler and went to the window to "call school." As she approached, a snowball came crashing through the pane, showering ice and broken glass over the benches and floor. A jagged piece struck her in the face. Half-blinded, she clapped her hands to her face. The blood spurted through her fingers. One of the little girls began to cry, and outside a roar went up as of an invading army.

The horrible fear came to Sylvia that she was blinded, but it was the snow merely, which had hurt

her eyes, not the more vicious glass which had cut into her cheek.

With her blood-stained handkerchief pressed to her face she rapped smartly on the window-casing with her ruler, then went to the door to do the same. Here she met the "big girls," who had arrived — as they were in the habit of doing — in a body: handsome, overbearing Lizzie Wood, wearing a black velvet Tam O'Shanter very much over one ear; Hilda Swanson, straw-colored, round-eyed, red-lipped; and the leader, Dorothy Pudney — why the leader, is left to the student of the psychology of country schools. She was neither prettier, nor wittier, nor wiser than the others; in fact she fell below any one of them in these characteristics. She was a bad dresser for two reasons — lack of means and lack of taste. But the fact remained that the feminine portion of District Number 3 — the "biggs," the "betweens," and the small girls, accepted her dictatorship unquestioningly.

In response to Sylvia's summons the scholars swarmed in, Earl Pudney last of all.

"What yeh rappin' for?" he demanded aggressively. "'Tain't school-time yet!"

A heat of anger rose in Sylvia. Ah, that was a foe to be dreaded. Earl Pudney could not be subdued by the anger of a girl so near his own age.

"I called you a little before school-time in order to arrange about seats," replied Sylvia. She still held her

bloody handkerchief to her cheek, which she felt to be swelling rapidly. She realized what that meant; instead of a normal face, a grotesque, one-sided countenance would be the focus of these critical young eyes.

"Awh, Pete Swanson and I always set in the back seat. And, anyway, this ain't the first day of school!"

"This is the first day of my school," returned Sylvia calmly, and took a pencil and pad from the desk. "Be quiet, please."

She wrote rapidly. Earl Pudney continued to talk out loud, and one of the Buttons scuffled with one of the Metzlauffs. Dorothy Pudney said something funny to Lizzie Wood about Sylvia's appearance and the two broke into spasms of ill-concealed mirth.

"Pete Swanson and William Anderson will sit in seat Number 1," read Sylvia from her list. "George Stone and Merton Button in seat Number 2; Earl Pudney and Gabe Peters in seat Number 3 —"

"Awh, I guess not!" broke in Earl Pudney — "Not with that little scrub! Wha'd yeh think I am — in the primer class?"

His faithful allies bleated in admiration. Sylvia proceeded with the Buttons, Metzlauffs, Wohoskey. She knew it was going to be hard on slender, butter-milk-eyed Sanderson Anderson to seat-yoke him with the pugnacious, bullet-headed Joe Metzlauff, but for diplomatic reasons it had to be done.

Then she began with the girls. For a reason of

her own she placed the little ones first. There was no trouble among the little ones. As she named seat-mates they smiled at each other and sidled to their appointed places. The "betweens" followed suit. But before seats 2 and 1 had been assigned the door opened to admit Merry Andrew. For this Sylvia had waited.

A murmur ran like a summer breeze over the school-room.

"Is *she* coming to school?" was heard in sibilant whispers from different groups.

Merry Andrew swung in with a haughty mien and a distinctly belligerent expression of countenance. Her morning struggle with Ambrosia had heightened her color and keened her temper. She was about to hang up her well-worn gray felt hat with its picturesque scarf when she caught sight of Sylvia's swollen cheek and blood-stained waist and handkerchief.

"Sylvia," she cried, "what is the matter?"

"Never mind, now," answered Sylvia quietly. "We are assigning the seats. Dorothy Pudney and Hilda Swanson, seat Number 2 —"

"Oh, see here, Sylvia Drew; we won't stand for that!"

It was Dorothy Pudney who objected this time.

"Silence!" The ruler struck the top of the desk sharply.

Dorothy's hand shot up with snapping fingers. "Now — we won't do no such thing! Liz an' I have

set together for years in the back seat an' we ain't goin' to give it up for nobody!"

The ruler played a sharp tattoo on the desk.

"Seat Number 1, Mary Ann Drew, and Elizabeth Wood. Pupils be seated, please, in the seats assigned to them."

"Not much!" muttered Earl Pudney, edging toward the door.

"You must either obey me or take your books and go home," announced Sylvia.

"I don't have to!" retorted Earl. "You ain't no teacher anyway! You're jest old Gran'dad Drew's girl!"

Sylvia's head reeled. What should she do? Oh, what could she do? She saw Merry Andrew upon her feet—her eyes blazing. Sylvia brought the ruler down again smartly.

"Sit down—everybody!" she commanded. Most of the pupils obeyed, Merry Andrew among the first. Earl Pudney backed toward the door.

"I would like you to stay a few moments, Earl—at least until you hear what I have to say." Sylvia's tone had a conciliatory ring. She tried to keep her voice brave and steady and her eyes away from those blazing ones in the back seat. She was suffering, but not as much as was Merry Andrew.

"We are going to make our school, especially our study of American history, more than usually interest-

ing. We are going to specialize in that branch. We Americans have done wonderful things in the past. We have fought and won great battles. It is more interesting than any story—the history of these struggles. For instance: Just a young fellow—merely a boy—coming at his country's need to command a fleet newly carved from the green timber along the banks of the Great Lakes.”

Sylvia was sparring for time. She had no idea of anything further. But suddenly she was conscious of the fixed attention of Frank and Joe, the warlike Metz-laffs, together with all of the Buttons from the oldest to the youngest. The Andersons, George Stone, and Gabe Peters were listening open-mouthed. Earl Pudney, trying to attract Pete Swanson's attention, stuck his tongue into his cheek, caricaturing Sylvia's swollen face; but the effort was lost on Pete, whose Scandinavian soul had suddenly responded to the call to arms in Sylvia's narration. He was actually listening to her instead of minding the antics of his leader.

Sylvia skipped to the Battle of New Orleans, with a casual mention of the part played in that battle by the Island pirates, Lafittes.

“We are going to read about those pirates,” she promised, “how brave they were, and how loyal, in spite of their nefarious business; how they stuck by the struggling United States army in the hour of greatest peril—how many in this school would like to

know how it all came out and what became of the pirates, the Lafitte brothers, after the war was over?"

A score of palms shot up, among them that of Pete Swanson. Every boy in the school was eager. They wanted to know — not in what year the stamp act took effect, nor the date of the purchase of Louisiana — they had had those unmeaning dates drilled into them in a set, unmeaning way through many terms of school. But pirates, boy admirals — yes, they honestly wanted to know; and in spite of sundry surreptitious signals from their chief, perched on the woodpile by the door, their minds remained occupied by the Lafitte brothers.

Even some of the more studious of the "betweens" on the girls' side showed interest. The younger ones could not be expected to do so. They were engaged in smiling winningly at new seatmates, comparing lead pencils, neck-charms, and other bits of personal property.

If it had not been for the presence in their midst of that imperious, indignant Merry Andrew, the big girls would have been whispering witty things to each other and smothering disconcerting bursts of mirth in scented handkerchiefs. As it was, Dorothy handed back a folded paper with "aint she prity" written on it. The paper flopped open on the desk under the eyes of the girl for whom it was meant, and likewise under those of the one for whom it was not meant. Where-

upon Merry Andrew choked back a snort of derisive mirth and penciled on the paper in large characters — “Eighteen years old and spells pretty with one t. Thick head!”

Liz Wood crushed the paper in her hand, but her face was flushed, and she wriggled uncomfortably in her seat. If the standard of superiority was to be efficiency in scholarship in place of mischief, as had been the rule in the past, it meant discomfort all along the line.

Then, suddenly, the attention of every boy and girl in school, big, between, and little, was pinned by what Sylvia was announcing: At the end of the term those scholars who stood high in deportment and scholarship were to take part in a grand, historical pageant — an operatic, spectacular affair, under the leadership and supervision of Mr. Robert Clyde. There would be a part in the play for everybody in the school — big or little — who cared to take part. How many cared?

Hands again all over the room; big and little, brown, pink, dimpled — dirty. Even Dorothy Pudney voted with enthusiasm. Earl did not vote, probably because the idea had not entirely penetrated his cranium.

Then, while everybody was in a receptive mood, Sylvia suddenly swung into everyday matters and began to arrange arithmetic classes.

That night after supper (of which she had eaten none) Sylvia sat by the stove and wept. The victory for which she had struggled and suffered was like to prove a barren one after all. For Grandfather and Grandmother, Merry Andrew and Mother agreed that for Sylvia to go to school in the morning with her face in the condition it was, would be presumption of the wildest sort.

"A doctor is what you need, and what you are going to have!" stormed Merry Andrew.

"Yes, yes," said Grandfather, "I'll hitch up first thing in the morning and bring him if I can get him through the drifts. There is glass in that cheek yet; I'm sure of it."

"And Earl Pudney is the simp who put it there!" raved Merry Andrew. "I grabbed Charley Wohoskey by the nape of the neck and shook him, and he told me the truth, but begged me not to let Earl Pudney know he told. He said Earl Pudney 'vouldt make him deatd, by gosh!'"

"Isn't it dreadful! Oh, isn't it dreadful!" wailed Sylvia in a nervous collapse. "It will all go for nothing now, and they will be worse than ever after a week's vacation!"

"But they won't get a week's vacation!" announced Merry Andrew. "I am going to teach District Number 3 myself until you are able to go back!"

The entire Drew family cried out in concert; and the tones, vocally discordant but mentally in harmony, caused Merry Andrew to burst into untimely laughter. At the same time she spunkily reiterated her determination.

CHAPTER X

After the doctor had come, extracted a dangerous splinter of glass from Sylvia's cheek and gone again, and during the following period of relief and ease, the Drews awoke to the disturbing realization that Merry Andrew had "done Ambrosia," and in spite of argument and commands of the evening before, had left for the schoolhouse.

Even more disturbing, to Grandfather's mind, was the fact that, in hunting for the "other snow-shovel" he had inadvertently opened the toolhouse door, thereby turning loose two determined collies which straightway left for school. He had whistled, he had threatened, he had promised and pleaded until Boy had shown symptoms of indecision by sitting down in the snow and wabbling a hesitating tail. Twoboy had not even wavered. Straight as the needle to the pole he struck the trail of his mistress and set off to begin his common school education.

Grandfather refrained from confessing his indiscretion in the house, and for a time Sylvia was spared the added anxiety. Grandmother was so sympathetic, so constant in her attendance upon the invalid, that Sylvia was heartily ashamed of her almost overpowering de-

sire to be left alone for a few moments to talk the matter over with Mother.

The opportunity came when Grandmother put on her over-socks and went to the barn with a basin of soaked bread-crusts for the hens.

"Mother," groaned Sylvia, "I can hardly stand it! To think of her there alone! They are like a pack of hyenas! And Merry Andrew will do the wrong thing every time—trust her for that! She will probably try to whip Earl Pudney. It will end in a regular riot!"

"Well, well, dear; she would go—you can't help it, neither can I, nor Grandfather. Your job now is to get well as soon as possible and go back; and in order to do that you must keep quiet and forget all about school. After all, perhaps Merry Andrew can manage them. You know how successful she was with Ambrosia."

"Ambrosia is a cow—a poor, brainless animal! Force and violence may work with Ambrosia, but it will fail in District Number 3! And I started in so well! I think I had the Anderson boys, two of the Buttons, and at least as many of the Metzlauffs, won over to my side; the promise of the entertainment would have held the three big, plotting girls until I could have really interested them in the school work. I know I can teach, if only the pupils will give me a chance to get them interested."

"Of course you can; your work with your music pupils shows that."

"Oh, music is so different!" groaned Sylvia. "You have but one at a time, and, somehow, you can pin that one's attention. But to be locked in with a cageful of roaring lions and tigers and — and —"

"There, there, forget your menagerie now, and try to read something, or to sleep."

"Isn't it the irony of fate?" grumbled Sylvia. "Sometimes it seems as if I must steal away from my work and read a book; and now here I sit with a chance to read and I can't bear the sight of a book! I wish I could see Wully McNab coming or going along the road; I would coax him to visit the school. At least he wouldn't let them tear Merry Andrew into shreds. You keep your eye out for him, will you, Mother?"

Mother promised, and then Grandmother came steaming in from the barn. Her anxiety for Sylvia's welfare was as great as Grandfather's, but her judgment was not so good. She had discovered the absence of the dogs and made her discovery known with loud and acrimonious comments. This added the last touch to Sylvia's nervous misery.

"Mother, can't you manage to sight Wully McNab?" she complained, and then laughed at her own peevishness. Neither Mother nor Sylvia succeeded in sighting Wully McNab — at least not early enough in

the day to be of any particular use. Instead, along in the afternoon they saw a woman coming plunging through the drifts along the front road, dragging a child by one arm. It was Mrs. Pudney, and she was headed for the Drew place. After a heaving voyage through the lane she reached the back door which Mother had already opened for her welcome, and thrust Evangeline within.

"My! Ain't this turrible?" she demanded, stamping the snow from her stockinged shoes. "Stamp off the snow, Evangeline! Stamp, I say, or your clothes will be wet to your waist!"

But Evangeline would not stamp. She seemed to favor the idea of bringing in as much snow as would cling to her immature shoulders and legs.

"They're a breakin' out down below our place, though; I seen a team down about Brown's. Looks to me like a Bendon livery, but I couldn't tell so fur down. And I'm so upset I couldn't put my mind on figurin' out teams! It wa'n't the McNab bays — I'm sure of that; nor Woods' folks, and I don't know of anybody else that would be fool enough to try to git out such wēather as this. I wouldn't uv come out, you betcha, if I hadn't been druv out — My land! Sylvia, you look funny! As if you had a chaw tobaccor in your cheek!"

Evangeline stared at Sylvia and then cackled in glee.

"She got a piece of glass —" began Grandmother, but Mrs. Pudney interrupted:

"I know all about it, and it's too bad, of course; but it ain't no more'n what everybody expected. As I told Mr. Pudney, you should uv known that Sylvia couldn't manage District Number 3 — Set down, Evangeline, an' behave yourself or I'll swatt yeh! You make me so nervous I'm ready to fly!"

In place of "setting down" Evangeline stood up and jerked herself loose from her mother's hold.

"It seems to me we pay enough school taxes to have a good man teacher who could manage the school. It's got us into a nice scrape — that's all I've got to say!"

"Why, what is the matter?" demanded Grandmother, and Sylvia shrank among her pillows in fearful anticipation.

"My — my — poor darlin' boy —" sobbed Mrs. Pudney, "has been chased and dog-chawed by that snippet of a sister of yours — Boo-hoo — his clothes torn — an' all black an' blue and mistreated — mistreated suthin' awful! He couldn't — couldn't hardly stagger home an' when he got there he — he — just fell on the floor an' bellered! 'Oh, ma,' he yelled, 'I've been wolloped suthin' awful!'"

A horror-stricken silence fell over the Drews, broken only by the sobs of the afflicted mother. It was so

dense that the howling of the mindless wind could be heard tearing at the house-corners without. At that tense moment the kitchen door opened and Grandfather, snow-powdered and puffing, stuck a storm-reddened face through the crack to inquire:

"Any of you women-folks had the big buggy whip? I can't find hide nor hair of it!"

"Grandfather, come in!" commanded Grandmother in a terrible voice.

Grandfather, realizing that some sinister matter was afoot, began his preparatory stamping. Mrs. Pudney swabbed her cheeks and nose, and crooked her neck for battle. She had not removed her "nubia"; it hugged her sallow cheeks closely, and together with her thin, beetling nose and little round, angry black eyes, gave her something of the appearance of a bald eagle poising to strike.

"As I told Mr. Pudney," she continued, as Grandfather proceeded with his stamping, "old man Drew and the old woman ain't to blame—they can't do nothin' with Merry Andrew anyway; but I says, I should think her mother oughta try to control her in some way! It is simply awful that a neighbor's children have got to be dog-chawed and pounded, an' never a word to have it stopped! But we ain' a gonta stand for it—that's all! Pudney's a comin' with Earl just as soon as he can git his clothes changed!" She gave her face a final swab, rose and crossed the room to

look from the north window for the remaining members of her family.

"Oh, landy! There comes that cutter in here! It's somebody from town, an' look at me — with this rag tied over my head and —"

"Oh, I do hope it isn't anyone coming in!" moaned Sylvia, grasping her handkerchief and pressing it to her swollen cheek.

"Well, it is somebody comin' here!" announced Mrs. Pudney with a ring of triumph in her voice. "And it's Mr. Bob Clyde, the minister's son!"

Sylvia made a motion to escape, but her mother made her lie still. If it had only been the minister in place of his son how glad she would have been! He would have seen nothing laughable in her twisted face. And even Wully McNab she would not have minded in the least, although, without wounding her as Mrs. Pudney's senseless comment had done, he would have had everybody in the room laughing at her. But Bob Clyde was the last person in the world she would have wished to see her in her present plight, or to hear Mrs. Pudney's arraignment of Merry Andrew's methods of school-teaching.

"Good landy! and me with this rag over my head!" mourned Mrs. Pudney again, but making no move to rid herself of it.

"Take it off," breathed Sylvia faintly, wishing that she might be rid of her own disfigurement as easily.

"Mum-um!" grunted Mrs. Pudney, "I can't." And Sylvia knew why.

Young Clyde, Grandfather, Mr. Pudney, and Earl, all came in together; the last mentioned showing unmistakable evidences of having passed through some sort of crisis. Bob Clyde went over to Sylvia and shook hands without the least show of mirth at her appearance.

"Now, this is too bad," he mourned sympathetically, "and just when you were starting out so bravely, too! What boy threw the snowball which broke the window?" he demanded so suddenly and so fiercely of Earl Pudney that Earl fairly jumped.

"I — I —" began Earl.

"You? You did such a thing? Look at her poor cheek!"

"I — done it, but — I didn't mean to!" blurted out Earl.

"Why, you ought to be whaled within an inch of your life!" declared Bob angrily.

Earl dodged behind his father.

"I — have been!" he breathed.

"I ain't got a word to say agin my boy bein' whaled when he needs it," put in Pudney, "but I ain't a goin' to stand havin' him hunted down by dogs just like a black slave; and that's what your girl done!"

"Do you mean to say that Merry Andrew set the dogs on Earl?" demanded Sylvia.

"Yes, ma'm, she did!" snapped Mrs. Pudney. "And I didn't raise my boy to be dog-chawed — not much I didn't!" She felt there was a chance yet to get Bob Clyde's sympathy on the Pudney side if the matter was worked right.

"Take off your coat, Earley," said Mrs. Pudney between sobs, "an' show 'em your back."

Earl wore a shirt which buttoned behind. It had been donned for exhibition purposes. His mother unbuttoned and flapped it open, disclosing a healthily welted and reddened back.

"It — it's worse further down," she witnessed chokingly.

"But there are no marks of dogs' teeth," objected Sylvia. "These are the marks left by a smart whipping."

"Yes, and even so his back is far from being in as bad a condition as your cheek is," commented Bob Clyde.

"Earl," said Sylvia kindly, "you know the dogs didn't hurt you. Come now — tell the truth before your father and your mother and all of us. You have played 'Robber' with Merry Andrew's dogs many a time, and you know it. You are hurt — I'll admit that — you've had an awful whipping —"

"Yes, the dogs did hurt me, too!" mumbled Earl. "They chawed me!"

"Chaw tobaccor — chaw tobaccor —" chanted

Evangeline. "Sylvia's got a chaw tobaccer in her face —"

"Shet your mouth!" admonished Mrs. Pudney, thrusting out a long arm for her daughter. Evangeline squealed and pounded out of reach on clumsy but effectual feet. She stuck out her tongue as she ran and climbed on a chair by the table under the south window. From this point of vantage she discovered and announced that "Wully McNab was comin' with a whole sleigh-load of youngones from school," and that Merry Andrew's dogs was "a wallop in' along behind."

This announcement proved correct in every particular.

"I am glad that Merry Andrew is coming, and that this matter can be thrashed out now, once and for all!" exclaimed Sylvia fervently.

"Yes," acquiesced Grandmother, "better settle it right now. If Merry Andrew has exceeded her authority she must be reprimanded!"

"Well I should say so!" breathed Mrs. Pudney.

"It is unfortunate that Sylvia was hurt," said Grandfather.

"Well — of course; but she couldn't teach District Number 3 no better'n the other one has," reiterated Mrs. Pudney. "We gotta have a man teacher to handle growin' boys like Earl!"

Grandmother shut her lips until they formed a hard

line across her face. She grasped the broom and stood ready to brush snow once more.

In they came, Patsy and Mame Kelley, the three little Smith girls; Solomon and Lucy and Bengie Franklin; Aggie Brown and her little brother Ray, who, on the strength of Sylvia's rule, had been started in again by his mother; Dorothy Pudney; Liz Wood; Merry Andrew, carrying the lost buggy-whip, her head cocked at a new angle of dignified authority; and the dogs, panting, snuffling, shaking — smilingly certain of having done the right thing at the right time, and very evidently delighted at seeing something so resembling a party at their house. Twoboy went at once to pay his respects to Mrs. Pudney, but bethinking himself of his snow-laden coat, shook it effectually just before reaching her.

"Git eaout, you nasty thing!" she shouted, warding him off with her foot. Grandmother, who usually ordered the dogs out of doors on such occasions, said never a word. Instead she opened the door to Wully, who had stopped to blanket the horses.

"Well, how is the smashed one?" he demanded; and then, "Bob Clyde, what are you doing up here in the country in this kind of weather? Sylvia, I believe this is a put-up job. You've shirked District Number 3 off on to Merry Andrew so that you can sit at home and play dominoes with Bob Clyde!"

"Mary Ann," began Grandmother solemnly, as chairman of the meeting, "Mr. and Mrs. Pudney are here to complain of your treatment of Earl. Now we want to hear the whole story of what took place at school today."

Merry Andrew turned haughty eyes upon Earl Pudney, and he seemed to shrivel under their light.

"What happened?" demanded Grandmother again.

"What happened was, that Earl Pudney was needing a licking pretty badly, and this is the day — and the date — when he got it!"

"Good girl!" howled Wully. "Did you — did you, Merry Andrew — Oh, Lordy, why didn't I visit the school today, as I intended to do!"

"I don't care anything about the licking," said Pudney. "If my boy deserves one, and the teacher is able to give it to him, why I'll never kick."

"Well, Mr. Pudney, he deserved it — and he got it," announced Merry Andrew. "And if you are satisfied, I am; and I can't see where the trouble comes in."

Then Mrs. Pudney arose in her wrath.

"I won't have my youngones set on by dogs!" she cried. Her voice broke in a screech and she stamped her foot in rage. "I didn't raise my boy to be dog-chawed!"

"Did Earl tell you that?" demanded Merry Andrew, perching on the edge of the table and calmly

removing her rubbers. "Did he tell you that my dogs hurt him?"

"Yes, he did! Come 'ere, Earl; I want to show 'em your back!"

But Earl refused sullenly. His father jerked him into the center of the room and his mother forcibly undid the button at the back of his neck and uncovered Exhibit A. The welts were already softening into a suffused rosiness which covered the entire back.

"I see," owned Merry Andrew, "his back smarts; it is red and sore — it's awful sore, but it isn't sore because of my dogs' teeth. It is sore because of my grandfather's buggy whip." She took up the whip from behind the door where she had set it when she came in and snapped it smartly.

"Simon Lagre-e-e!" groaned Wully McNab, and Bob Clyde smothered a laugh into a cough by the help of his handkerchief.

"Earl knows the dogs would not hurt a rabbit," went on Merry Andrew. "He knows their trick of playing 'robber,' and Evangeline knows. She is always teasing me to make them play it. Will you play now, Evangeline, to show your mother —"

Evangeline stood up to accept the invitation, but her mother bade her "go 'long and set down!"

"Wully McNab," challenged Merry Andrew, "will you be the robber, to help me prove that my dogs do not hurt anybody when they play the game?"

Wully rolled a pair of mournful eyes at Grandmother.

"Isn't this awful, Mrs. Drew? Leigh Hunt hasn't anything on this, I'm sure — that time, you remember when '— ramped and roared the lions with horrid laughing jaws,' and the lady made her lover jump right down on top of 'em! Little did I dream when I read that poem that I should ever consent to be 'dog-chawed' for the love of a lady! But, here goes!" He snatched Grandmother's shawl from its nail beside the hall door, threw it over his cap, and caught up Evangeline as Bob Clyde threw open the back door.

"Oh, heavings!" cried Wully in tragic accents. "The riv-ah is chunked with chokes of ice!" Then he plunged forth.

The ends of the shawl flew out in the wind; so, also, did Evangeline's lank, white-stockinged legs and black shoes. With all the strength she had left and with some wavering shreds of her lately-acquired dignity, Merry Andrew held her dogs in check until the grotesque fugitive had floundered some twenty yards up the newly-broken road. Then she let go with the cry of "Robber!"

There was a spurt of snow, a yellow streak, and two dogs, a young man and a girl rolling together in a white mist. Bob Clyde yelped with laughter. Merry Andrew leaped through the snow, relieved her depu-

ties and brought in her prisoners, Evangeline riding pick-a-back on the be-shawled shoulders of the panting Wully. She was squealing with delight, her tongue lolling out of the corner of her mouth, her remaining features sadly in need of a handkerchief.

"I'm — not — dog-chawed," panted Wully, "but I'm girl-chawed! Your daughter bit me, Mrs. Pudney! Do you know if there has ever been hydrophobia in your family?"

"My land," said Grandfather, speaking for the first time, "our dogs wouldn't hurt anybody!" while Grandmother wielded the broom to rid the returning party of snow.

"How did we appear from the rear?" demanded Wully with earnest anxiety.

"You appeared from the rear as you appear from the front — a saucy fellow!" declared Grandmother, giving him a playful bat with the broom.

"Come on," commanded Mr. Pudney, "I guess we've made fools enough of ourselves — let's git home!"

"Pile into the sleigh," invited Wully, "I'm going down as far as Woods'. By the way, Bob, how's the drammer coming along? Write in a good part for me, will you? Dad has changed his mind again about the military school. He says he has too much respect for the army of his native land to introduce into it any such material as I would make. He is trying to

think of something worse to do with me. I may be sent to Wellesley, or Vassar. While he is thinking up something I shall probably stay home and be here when the show is pulled off. I want more practice in the dramatic line. It may be my strong point — what I am best fitted for, you know. Father doesn't think so. He says the only thing in the world I am fit for is hauling and spreading. But that's the way with genius — always. Look at Watts and his teakettle! — or — say, teacher!" He addressed Merry Andrew and snapped his fingers aloft — "was it Watts, or Stevens, or Fulton who had the teakettle? Anyhow, Bob, I'll take a part in the show — any part except that of George Washington; I'm facially and spiritually unfitted for that part. Those little hatchet stunts, Bob — you see — I can't do them, really. I know, because I've tried 'em on dad."

"I hope, Mr. Pudney," quavered Sylvia, "that you will send Earl to school."

Merry Andrew again pinned Earl with that mysterious, compelling stare.

"You are coming to school tomorrow and intend to be a good boy?" she demanded.

"Yes — yes, ma'am," he answered.

"You bet he is!" seconded his father. "And if he needs another thrashing you give it to him, and I'll put another atop of it when he gits home!"

"There will be no need," replied Merry Andrew

loftily, and began to help Mother and Grandmother re-bundle the children for the remainder of their ride.

When they were all gone, and Grandmother had swept out the last particle of snow and closed the door with a bang; and Merry Andrew had laid aside her school dress and with it her teacher's dignity and prepared for her nightly tussle with Ambrosia, the Drews gathered around her and demanded the facts in the case.

"Girl alive," breathed her mother, "how did you manage to whip a great boy like Earl Pudney — a grown man, almost?"

"I didn't," owned Merry Andrew, "and when I finish with Ambrosia, if I'm still alive, I'll tell you all about it."

"Sylvia's theory of love and persuasion and so on, is all right," said Merry Andrew, putting her feet into the oven, "if you work 'em on human beings; but for a critter like Earl Pudney you have to have a gad; nothering else will answer!"

"Honestly, I knew the minute I stepped foot into the school-house Monday morning, there would have to be a battle. Whether on the girls' side, or the boys' side, I couldn't make up my mind. But this morning when I got there I knew it would likely happen before night, and I braced myself for it.

"I was awfully put out when the dogs arrived; I

didn't want them in the scrape. But as it turned out it was just as well.

"I didn't make any speech; instead I laid Grandfather's buggy-whip across the desk and called school."

Grandmother sniffed.

"What did you expect to do, whip the whole school at once?"

"No, I expected to take 'em one at a time, but I intended to be thorough. When I would begin to get the shakes I'd think of Sylvia laid out here on the lounge with her cheek full of glass. That would brace me. Sylvia wouldn't use force, and there was force needed, and I was the force candidate.

"Well, Earl Pudney wouldn't come into the house when I rang the bell; instead, he stuck his head through a crack in the door and drawled, 'M-a-r-y A-n-n-n Come out an' lick me, M-a-r-y A-n-n.' If I'd had a gun I'd shot him!"

"Merry Andrew!" cried the feminine portion of the Drew family in shocked unison. But Grandfather squirmed in his seat, chuckling:

"Couldn't blame her much! Couldn't blame her much!"

"Well, I didn't have a gun; I didn't take one with me in the morning; but I had a whip and I knew it was up to me to use it. I made my speech then. I said, 'This school is no child's play. It's earnest work. We Drew girls are going to teach it — one or

the other of us — all winter. And I want to say, right here and now, there is going to be discipline maintained even if we have to punish every scholar in school. I'm going to begin with Earl Pudney, who deserves it the most.' Said I, 'He isn't bright, and he isn't handsome; and why you boys, who have more brains than he has, let him lead you round by the nose, and spoil your winter's work, is something I can't figure out. But you seem to do it, just the same.'

"Here Dorothy Pudney made a face and mimicked me out loud. I took my whip and I walked down to her desk, and, I tell you, the school held its breath. It thought I didn't dare do it.

"I kept saying over and over, 'Not in anger, Mary Ann Drew — not in anger, but in mercy and justice!'

"'Get up!' I called to Hilda Swanson, and she got! Dorothy's hands lay spread out on the desk. I drew the whip across them with all my might. It fairly sizzled in the air."

"Oh, Merry Andrew! Merry Andrew!" cried the three feminine voices again.

"That is what Dorothy yelled out," said Merry Andrew soberly, "and I told her that while the real teacher was sick, and I was acting as her substitute, I was to be addressed as Miss Drew.

"Some of the little girls began to cry. Said I, 'Nobody who is good in this school is going to be

hurt; but —” and I glared around that room like a she-hyena — ‘everybody who is bad is going to get hurt, and good and plenty! Now,’ I told them, ‘I am going out after the ring-leader; and I want order kept in this room while I am gone. I appoint Charles Wohoskey, Ray Brown, and Honoria Smith as monitors. I want you three to remember everything bad that is said or done, and who says or does it (You’d ‘a’ died laughing to have seen those three young ones). Then I put on my hat and cloak and boots and sailed out. I stopped at the door and took a look over the room. Everything was still except that Dorothy Pudney was nursing her fingers and sobbing.

“I didn’t need to call the dogs; they were at my heels, of course. As I stepped out Earl Pudney was just about to open the door again to start something. He scooted off down the south road. I had expected him to run toward home, and I intended to follow and whale him if it had to be done behind his mother’s kitchen stove.

“I followed, with the dogs, until he had gone over the crest of the little hill. That was what I wanted. I knew it was going to be an awful fight, and I didn’t want the other children to see the battle. After he got over the hill he started to leave the road and take to the fields. He was intending to make a detour, get back to the schoolhouse, and get in his work there before I could catch up with him; but I whispers ‘Rob-

ber!' to the dogs and lets 'em loose. They had him down in no time — kicking and swearing.

"Just then I sighted Mr. McNab — old Wully — coming across the field toward the road. He climbed the fence into the road and asked what the matter was. I told him what Earl had been doing — how he had hurt Sylvia, broken the window, and played up generally; and I wound up with: 'And I'm going to thrash him!'

"Give me the whup," said Mr. McNab, "and call off your dogs!"

Grandfather slapped his knee and gave vent to his emotions in broken ejaculations of appreciation.

"That was a licking, I tell you!" went on Merry Andrew. "That was a good job if ever there was one! The beauty of it was, old — I mean Mr. — McNab didn't seem to be doing it in anger; he was as calm as a May morning — calm, but terrible!

"Earl shrieked and begged for mercy, and promised everything under the sun. I began to get uneasy. 'I think that will do now, if you please, Mr. McNab,' I said. But old — Mr. — McNab said 'Whust! I know maire — (Whack, whack!) about whuppin' (Whack, whack!) than you do — I've had (Whack, whack) Wully to br-r-r-ing up!'

"After he had finished with Earl he told him not to say a word to anybody about who had done the job. 'Let stahnd the schoolmom did it,' he warned him.

He made Earl promise to obey the slightest inflection of my voice; to come to school and study; and on top of all he promised Earl that on the slightest turn to the left or to the right from the path of rectitude and virtue, he'd 'Get it over-r-r-r again an' whor-r-r-r-s-e!'

"Earl didn't want to go into the schoolhouse, but I thought best that he should on account of the — how is it the war correspondents put it? — on account of the morale of the rest of the boys; I thought it would be well that they should have a living example of the awfulness of a Drew licking.

"You never in your life saw such a cowed school. Ambrosia couldn't hold a candle to it for cow-dness. Earl Pudney sat with his face in his arm, Dorothy sobbed, while I called for the report of the monitors. Charley Wohoskey was the only one of the three who had anything to report. He said, 'Chorge Stone he blow his nose!'

"After awhile Earl raised his hand and asked, very politely, if he might be excused; said he was sick, and I couldn't doubt but that he was. I excused him, of course. I suppose he got to thinking, as he sat there smarting, how he could get back at me without breaking any of his promises to Mr. McNab. He decided that the easiest way would be to get his mother going on the dog question."



Just then I sighted Mr. McNab — old Wully — coming
across the field. *See Page 155*

"Such works!" exclaimed Grandmother.

"It had to be done," said Merry Andrew, "and it turned out better than I expected. That was a hard, sweaty job which Mr. McNab — bless him — took off my hands; but unless I am awfully mistaken it has cleared the atmosphere of District Number 3 for the whole term.

"To cap the climax, Ambrosia had one of her spells tonight. I never knew her to be more cantankerous. How true it is that troubles hunt in crowds."

"The doctor says that Sylvia will have a scar on her cheek," said Grandmother. Merry Andrew threw a glance of commiseration at her sister.

"That reconciles me to the thought that Earl Pudney will most likely have one or two on his back; I don't see how it could be otherwise."

"He won't be back to school," chuckled Grandfather.

"Yes he will," declared Merry Andrew.

"His father said today —" began Mother.

"Earl Pudney doesn't care very much about what his father says or what his mother says; but Earl Pudney won't care to break the promise he made to Mr. Wully McNab, Senior — be sure of that!"

"I should think you would have a little more respect for Mr. McNab after this," said Grandmother; and Merry Andrew took her stockinged feet out of

the oven, went over and put an arm around Grandmother's neck as she answered :

“ Nobody in this neighborhood can think more of Mr. Wully McNab, Senior, than I do this day ! ”

CHAPTER XI

It was the Tuesday after Sylvia had taken her belated examination for her teacher's certificate, and passed, that the most exciting event since the regeneration of Earl Pudney occurred in the McNab District. For two months school had been going on smoothly, evenly and with less than the ordinary amount of friction in country schools.

The Drew family often sat about the living-room stove of an evening talking over the situation.

"The trouble was," Mother would say, "Merry Andrew kept them in order; she ruled them, but it took all her mind and energy. She taught them nothing. See what has been accomplished under Sylvia's management: They are so interested in decimal fractions, The Critical Period in American History, parliament, how pelicans feed their young, that they have forgotten to be mischievous. And now they are all alive over this question of building a new school-house."

"That's all true enough," owned Grandfather. "Sylvia has sown seed, but — Merry Andrew broke the stubborn glebe!"

"With the help of a good old Scotch arm and twa dogs," laughed Mother.

On this particular Tuesday afternoon Sylvia squared the books on her desk, the bell, the ruler, the tin "buzz" and knife-handle replevined from Charley Wohoskey, and gazed out over the room with a critical eye. In the back seat Pete Swanson was vividly pursuing the fate of the Constitution; William Anderson was again triumphing over a problem in algebra. (There on the back seat William could concentrate on his problems. Heretofore what with digging gum out of his hair and the back of his neck and protecting himself from attacks in the rear, poor slow William had been unable to get the slightest inkling of algebra, and had blundered along, misjudged, misunderstood and counted a blockhead all through his school experience.) The buttermilk-eyed Sanderson Anderson, a student by nature, had not expected to be at ease paired off with Earl Pudney. Happily he had been disappointed. Earl did not study — had no capacity for it — but he behaved; which might have been accounted for by the fact that he was ever in the line of vision of a pair of stormy dark eyes which shone out from seat number 1 on the girls' side. The memory of that fifteen minutes with McNab, and the warning that it would be duplicated with something extra for good measure should anything happen, kept him tractable and silent. Sylvia, looking down upon his vacuity, pitied him greatly. To be incapable of assimilating the fine, vivid things of life; to be alive

to the coarseness only, was indeed a sorry fate. When Sylvia remembered this, and remembered also that Merry Andrew, for all her warm heart and quick sympathies, had never softened toward him, she could have patted his tousled empty head and wept for pity.

His sisters, on the other side of the room, were fully as empty and as mischievous as he; and lacking his incentive for rectitude, were at times trying, to say the least, especially the younger, with her noisy, clumpy shoes, her exposed tongue and untidy habits.

But to offset these were the shining faces of the other little ones, the "betweens," happy, protected, interested — adoring; the apple-cheeked Buttons and bullet-headed Metzlauffs and struggling Wohoskeys, who had learned more during these two months than in all the previous weary terms put together. Without undue egotism Sylvia knew this to be the truth, and she groaned inwardly for fear it might be her duty to give up her hopes of studying and teaching music and stick to District Number 3. Well, if it was, she would be brave — as Merry Andrew was brave, always, in taking up disagreeable duties. At least it did not need to be decided that afternoon. A pleasanter task was at hand.

She had an announcement of great importance to make:

Robert Clyde had become so enthusiastic over his play that he wished to give it on an adequate stage.

The manager of the Bendon Opera House had suggested his bringing it to town and paying for the hall with a percentage of the door money. This arrangement would make possible the "stately minuet" which had been discarded with so much reluctance because of the objection of some of the members of the church where the entertainment was to have been held; also a picturesque Indian dance, and other stage effects impossible in a church.

Sylvia touched the bell for the pupils to put aside their books. The signal came as a surprise, for school had but just been called after the noon recess.

"This afternoon," announced Sylvia, "we are to begin rehearsing for our entertainment. Mr. Robert Clyde will be here at three o'clock to arrange and assign parts. And hereafter every Friday afternoon and three evenings a week will be given over to rehearsals. In place of in the church, the play is to be given in the Bendon Opera House, and we must work the harder to do ourselves and Mr. Clyde credit, considering the fact that not only our parents and friends — who would overlook faults — but critical strangers will see our play, and judge us according to our merits."

As yet no philosopher has adequately explained humanity's passion for making a show of itself. The little girl loves the thrill, the fright, even painful at times, of going upon the platform to speak her piece; the boy will walk miles through mud and slush carry-

ing a banner the device of which is meaningless to him; the young man would lecture and sway thousands; the young woman would be an actress; the elderly woman with quavering voice but delighted heart rises to read the Sunday school statistics; the old man airs his political convictions before the town council, or makes long prayers — surely, the play's the thing, and never more than in a country school.

And to think! not in the church, but in the town! In the opera house — it was like a fantastic dream!

By the time Robert Clyde arrived with the manuscript of the play and unlimited authority in the matter of assigning parts, the McNab District was nothing less than a hotbed of feverish anticipation, mingled with some little apprehension. Those who had not always measured up in deportment thought tremblingly of their sins, wondering if Sylvia would be cruel enough to remember and nudge Bob Clyde when the fat parts were being given out.

"Who want to be Continental soldiers and fight for America?" demanded Bob Clyde. Every boy in school clamored to defend his country.

"You will be dressed in rags," announced Robert; "the Britishers will have fine red coats." All of the Metzlauffs, two of the Buttons, Ray Brown and Charley Wohoskey, immediately turned traitors and signified their willingness to join the enemy.

"We'll see," promised Robert Clyde, and the drill-

ing began. Hilda Swanson was the lone Tory lady in the play; Dorothy Pudney wavered between the part of Martha Washington and the Spirit of Liberty, who appeared in the allegorical interlude and sang a solo, deciding at last upon the latter. (Gene McNab secretly rearranged the solo, making of it an obligato solo with heavy and obliterating chorus.)

Lizzie Wood chose to be the hypothetical Indian maiden, an excusable and picturesque figment of the dramatist's imagination, very much adorned with feathers and beads, and always, always true to the interests of the white people. This left the part of Martha Washington to go begging, and Merry Andrew "chinked in" with final and unexpected success.

Perhaps the studious pupils lost ground a little during the latter part of school, but the dull ones made up. They awakened. The proceeds of the entertainment were to go towards a new school library, and they were quite certain this was the reason for their interest.

When Sylvia called school Monday morning she begged the pupils to put aside all thoughts of the entertainment during study hours. Of course she knew this to be an impossibility, but she also realized that she had taken the last trench; lowered the last banner of revolt. When she looked down into the eyes of Hilda Swanson, Elizabeth Wood, and even of Dorothy Pudney and met glances of *comaraderie* in

place of sullenness or treachery, she knew the victory was with the Drews. District Number 3 had something better to do now, something more exciting even than baiting a harassed and helpless teacher.

Much against her father's will Gene McNab had her piano moved into the big, hall-like room in the basement. Around the sides of this room she ranged benches and chairs, and here, during rests between drills, opposing armies ate apples, scuffled, and knocked each other off the seats with international good will; where those who, upon the last great occasion would be stately Colonial dames, hobnobbed with Tellamoosa, the Indian maiden. Gradually the costumes began to be evolved and donned at the rehearsals that the actors might become familiar with them. The first dress rehearsal for Tellamoosa so startled Charley Wohoskey that he had to be forcibly restrained from galloping off to safety.

"Aye tank mabby she bite me!" he explained to assistant stage-manager Wully McNab.

"Now, Sharley," soothed Wully, "Aye fix you oop so you schare 'em all!" And he kept his word. Charley was cast for the colored page of the great and only George. It was Robert Clyde's own idea, and in carrying it out he dimmed — almost completely destroyed — the effectiveness of his own part. Robert played the part of George Washington himself, and deserved to make a hit, with his unapproachable uni-

form, sent expressly from a New York costumer's; his fine and stately carriage, his solemn, handsome face, under its disguising, beribboned wig. He deserved a triumph — would undoubtedly have enjoyed one, but for his valet.

Charley was not made up until within the last half hour before the curtain rose on the night of the play; and was not even then allowed to see himself as others — all Bendon, in fact — were to see him, for fear he would get frightened at himself and refuse to take the part. History gives Washington's body servant the stature of a man; but what is art if it may not take poetic liberties?

Wully McNab took Charley in hand and made him up; and Charley took Bendon by storm. Wully saw the advantage in that preternatural droop of Charley's mouth, and accentuated it; that barren plateau, where scarcely any nose obtruded; those frightened, frog-like eyes, set wide apart upon the very edges of the plateau; those gangling, uncertain legs; those arms, which hung unnaturally long in skin-tight black sweater-sleeves; those splattery hands, vainly wandering in search of rest.

Charley's entire part consisted in keeping in the wake of his magnificent master. When Washington stepped upon the stage a flattering breath of admiration stirred the audience until Charley appeared, which always happened as soon as Wully could prod him forth.

Then the breath would suddenly swirl into a howling cyclone of merriment, startling and alarming Charley. He would waver, turn bulging, frightened eyes toward the boxes, press a slow black paw against his drooping mouth, and then in response to Wully McNab's rattlesnake hiss from the wings, suddenly return to his part and canter off after his majestic principal.

When Bendon talked of the show — as it did for months afterward — it agreed unanimously that it was good; that “those little country girls were just awfully pretty; especially the Martha Washington, who danced the minuet so charmingly!” But the one who elicited the most comment was that “inhuman little nigger! Wherever did they get him? And how did they manage to train him to be so screamingly funny, and he with never a word to say!”

After it was all over the children and their parents were invited to stop, on their way home, at the Drews, to partake of a light lunch and to talk over their triumphs.

“I thought Bengie did real well,” Mrs. Franklin whispered to Grandmother Drew, balancing her coffee-cup on the top of Solomon's head as he clung to her skirts.

“I knew that flag costume would be becomin' to Dorothy,” purred Dorothy's mother to Mrs. Smith,

who replied absently that it was, but in her opinion the little children's singing pleased Bendon folks more than anything else in the whole show. The musical little Smith girls had been conspicuous in the children's chorus.

Maternal cares prevented Mrs. Wohoskey from attending the entertainment; but Charley's father announced quite brazenly that "Sharley he take de cake!"

Wully McNab complained that his lungs were hopelessly clogged with cotton-batting and face-powder. Wully had appeared briefly as the pathetic Major André, and been sentenced to be hanged almost immediately, to allow him to get back to his duties in the dressing-rooms.

It was really one o'clock before the last sleigh-load went jangling away from the Drew door, and a half-hour later before Robert Clyde stood, coated, gloved, and hat in hand, ready to drive back to Bendon.

"I don't know how we are ever going to repay you," admitted Sylvia, her eyes drooping before his smiling gaze.

"Repay me?" he replied. "I've had the time of my life. And I want you to promise me solemnly, Sylvia, that if you take the school next summer you will let me try again. I want to write myself a part in which I need not always appear in company with a

rival star. I shall arrange the acts so that Charles Wohoskey and I will not be on the stage together. I'm intending to have him come on with Wully!"

"With my consent Sylvia shall not teach the McNab school next summer," said Merry Andrew. "But then, of course, my consent hasn't much weight; if it had she would not have taught it this winter."

"I shall never be sorry that I did it," replied Sylvia seriously, "although no one knows better than I do that if you hadn't all turned in and helped me, I should have made a mess of it." She took Merry Andrew's hand, and Robert's, and he would have taken Merry Andrew's, thus completing the circle.

"United we stand," he laughed.

But Merry Andrew refused to complete the circle.

"We will leave a gap right here," she said, "for Gene McNab and — Wully. They deserve to be in the ring."

"And Wully McNab, Senior!" called Mother from the depths of the living-room.

"Ho!" replied Robert, "old Wully hasn't had much to do with the matter."

"More than you know, perhaps," chuckled Grandfather, and got scolded after Robert had gone for nearly revealing a secret which up to that time had remained inviolate between the Drews, a McNab, and one lone Pudney.

CHAPTER XII

A passing year brings changes to every community; to the old an added weakness — another ache; to the young, experiences which they are sure have never come to the human race before their day. Loves, for instance, or heartbreaks. To Merry Andrew and Sylvia, plodding steadily and rather hopelessly along their individual lines of labor, change, although marked in some quarters, had not seemed to affect their personal fortunes appreciably. Grandfather's strength and courage ebbed a little more swiftly, and the burdens and responsibilities of the farm bore with corresponding heaviness upon Merry Andrew's shoulders.

"It's a shame," mourned Sylvia, "that a young girl, and a pretty girl like Merry Andrew should be doomed to feed calves, drive mower, stack hay and milk cows in all sorts of weather." The complaint was made to Mother, but Merry Andrew, getting into her moccasins and rubber boots in the shed-room, overheard it.

"Am I pretty?" she called out impersonally, then came in, took off her barn hat and stood before the kitchen looking-glass inquiringly. She beheld a round, highly-colored face, dark, thick-lashed eyes dominated

by rather imperious brows, a decent sort of nose, and a pair of wide, full, and very red lips; the whole framed by dusky, rather coarse-textured hair of a loosely-wavey tendency. That much as a bare canvas; the different pictures wrought upon it by flashes of mirth, passion, mischief or affection, the thousand subtle variations of a most variable nature, Merry Andrew could not see. Just that blank critical stare made it a very commonplace face indeed, and she announced her decision accordingly:

"I'm rawther too red, and too sort of — bossy-looking, ain't I?" she acknowledged frankly. "But it doesn't make much difference how I look so long as I am stout, and as solid as a chunk of pin oak; that's what makes me valuable on a farm where everything has to be done without tools and without technical skill — just by sheer bone labor and driving power."

"I should hate to have Grandfather hear you talk that way," cautioned Mother.

"He hears me almost every day," returned Merry Andrew. "I talk it to him all the time. I say, 'Grandfather, you're too slow; you are farming as men farmed when you were a boy; you are paying taxes on a lot of land that is shirking on you, and old Wully McNab who holds the mortgage on it is going to be the winner.' 'Grandfather,' I say, 'we are trying to do something which other folks do better because they know more about it.'"

"Modern farming methods take money," sighed Mother.

"Of course!" returned Merry Andrew, jamming her hat upon her head until just a suggestion of dark locks was to be seen in its shadow. "Of course it takes money. We have none, and so we are planting the same old crops in the same old fields year in and year out, and they are growing scantier and poorer and paler every season. And pretty soon old Wully McNab will kindly relieve us of the farm, and then, says I, you'll hear a rustle!" Merry Andrew threw out shapely hands to illustrate—"Bur-r-r-r—rotation of crops, fertilizers, lime for the low grounds and cultivation for the high, a rich and valuable place—with the Drews in the poorhouse!" She swept out, leaving Mother and Sylvia to talk the matter over carefully and think it over prayerfully.

The outcome of the interview was that Merry Andrew went to an agricultural school for three months during the winter, and came home with her head filled with lore regarding legumes, silage, factory-farming, and other up-to-date ideas which Grandfather said were theoretical, impracticable and impossible of realization, especially under existing financial conditions. There was no living in peace with her.

From the first, Grandmother had not approved of her going and had small patience with her theories.

But the girl dreamed, and while she dreamed she grumbled :

"It's all right for Grandmother, piecing a Star-of-Hope bedquilt while Mother gets the dinner and Sylvia churns, to gaze out across the field and see Grandfather and me hoeing corn that never will amount to shucks because the land is all worn out. If you should jog her up about it, she would say it was not a woman's business — to fuss about the growing of the corn; that the woman's place was to learn to use the corn economically after it was ground into meal; that was what the Lord required of the woman. But look at me; I'm forced into the field to work, ain't I?"

"Don't say that," expostulated Mother.

"But it's the truth —"

"I mean, don't say 'ain't I'; say, 'am I not?'"

"Oh, shucks!" retorted Merry Andrew with a fling, "that don't express it!"

During the year the electric road had been put through from Bendon to the Corners, and although the cars were not yet running, the latter place had begun to take on the aspect of a village. The new school-house had been built there, together with a general store, a blacksmith shop, an I. O. O. F. hall, with a moving picture outfit on the ground floor, and with sundry other townlike innovations. As soon as the community could agree upon a name, there would

be a post office, and the church society was actually contemplating a new building. Sylvia and Mother were in a tremor of suppressed and surreptitious excitement over this last fact; surreptitious because women who had no time nor money to devote to a cause must not serve on committees nor have much to say.

As for Merry Andrew, her heart and mind were so absorbed by home problems and financial questions that she gave little heed to church matters, except to be sorry that Mr. Clyde had gone to a better charge in a larger place than Bendon; consequently a stranger filled the pulpit of the little church at the Corners on Sunday afternoons.

Robert Clyde had been, or rather, was to be, promoted. The Bendon Bank, where he clerked, was one of a chain of small banks, and the head of the concern had selected young Clyde as manager of a branch to be established in South America. Bob was busy studying Spanish, it being necessary to be familiar with that language in order to fill the new and responsible position to which he had been assigned.

Wully McNab was, as usual, intermittently at home, and his sister, Gene, in talking matters over with the Drews, shook her head sadly.

"I don't know what is to become of the lad," she mourned. "He doesn't seem to fit in anywhere. He says, 'Gene, when once I get into the right place, I'll

stick.' Mother wants him to study medicine. Wully says he has more aptitude for the ministry — think of it! — he's always joking, you know. Never serious for five minutes together. Father wants him to study law, and he did really start in to read. But he said the books were really dryer than J. Fenimore Cooper's novels; no surprise, no point, no dénouement. Oh, I don't know what will become of him when I go away for good!" Gene had a lover of her own and was to be married soon.

Merry Andrew thought a great deal about Wully McNab's problem. As she very well knew, under all his frivolity was a vein of manliness, of generosity, of tenderness. He had been over-disciplined by his father and over-indulged by his mother, and between them, they had spoiled a naturally sweet-dispositioned boy. In the end he would go to the bad, of course; such young men invariably did go to the bad, unless someone should happen along who was witty and brave and good enough to take Wully by the back of the neck, figuratively speaking, and shake him into a realization of the seriousness of life; into a consciousness that it was not a joke. Look at Bob Clyde, now. What a contrast! Earnest, studious, sober, and growing more so every year; preparing himself by hard work to fill responsible positions in the world, and such positions already coming to meet him half way.

As a matter of fact, ever since that spindle and

distaff sermon which Bob had preached at the time of the opening of the church, he had taken a decided turn. Surely, Bob had taken his own sermon to heart; he had prepared his spindle and distaff and God was furnishing the flax.

But poor Wully McNab's spindle was buried in his father's inconsequential wealth, his distaff unprovided. Perhaps, after all, driving poverty, like that suffered by the Drews, was better for the soul. At least it had a tendency to keep lazy people on the alert, and if any little wisps of flax were wafted their way, they would be ready for them. Merry Andrew felt very sorry indeed for Wully McNab.

March that year came in like a lamb, and was now — fully two weeks ahead of time — getting itself into the proverbial attitude for a spectacular exit. Grandfather's rheumatism had assumed, one after another, all the disagreeable symptoms of which that sneaking disease is capable. For three days he had not been able to go to the barn, and Sylvia had been obliged to take his part in the preparation of the seed wheat.

"And I'd about as lief have one of those white leg-horn pullets turn fanning mill for me as to have Sylvia do it!" declared Merry Andrew ungratefully. "She's afraid of getting her dress dirty, and she is afraid of getting her hands scratched, and she flutters, flutters — oh, pshaw! — I wish we had a good hired man; one even as good as Bartholomew Vonvolkenberg." Bar-

tholomew had, the year before, bestowed his overwhelming name upon a young woman of his acquaintance and set up farming on his own hook.

But Merry Andrew was to learn that Grandfather's slowness and Sylvia's flutterings were not the worst things to endure. Fate had even harder trials in store.

She went to sleep one night lulled by the bugling of a wild March wind to be awakened by her mother's voice and the flare of a lamp in her face. In her nightgown, her red hair hanging like a cloak about her shoulders, the lamp held aloft in shaking hands, Mother was a veritable Lady Macbeth. Her face showed an unusual pallor and her eyes appeared black in contrast.

"Get up and dress as quickly as you can," she said, "Grandfather is dying!"

"Oh, Mother!" gasped the girls in unison, and were out of bed in a moment, Sylvia quietly and swiftly getting into her clothes, Merry Andrew fumbling at hers, scolding and muttering as was her wont under stress of feeling.

"Sylvia, come and help us as soon as you can," directed Mother, "and you, Merry Andrew, run to Pudney's and ask him to take our team and go to Bendon for the doctor. And hurry, dear — hurry! Oh, if only the doctor were here this minute something might be done! Here's the lamp; bring it down with you when you come."

Merry Andrew fairly flew. Out in the night with

the wind buffeting her, and the rain cutting through the little knitted shawl which Sylvia had thrown about her shoulders, she fought the worst of enemies — remorse. Poor, patient old Grandfather! Poor, suffering, plodding Grandfather! And she had worried him and badgered him and called him slow. And now he was going away from her forever — forever! And it served her right; she didn't deserve a grandfather nor a grandmother nor a sister nor any relatives at all! And oh, if he would only get well again she hoped she would know enough to be decent to him, to be loving and tender! But he never would get well again; hadn't Mother said he was dying? Oh, to see him going stumbingly to the barn once more! To see him smile at her in his crooked, kindly, whimsical way! Why couldn't she run faster! Why, she was as slow as Grandfather himself!

Pudney's at last! She fairly threw herself against the door, pounding with all her might. There was no response. The Pudneys were in the first deep sleep of the night. Merry Andrew ran down the steps, around the house and beat a wild tattoo on the east bedroom window. A thin female voice within cried, "Fire!"

"Mr. Pudney! Mr. Pudney!" screamed Merry Andrew.

"Fire! Fire!" piped the voice from within, and somewhere in the house bare feet struck floor-boards,

while a mingled murmur of feminine and masculine tones proclaimed the Pudneys aroused at last.

"It is I — Merry Andrew! Grandfather is —" She could not bring herself to use her mother's words; there might yet be hope — there must be! "Grandfather is terribly sick! Will you take our team and go for Dr. Ames? Hurry! I'll run back and harness the mares."

"What seems to be the matter with the old man?"

"Oh, don't stand there asking — asking! I don't know what is the matter. Get ready. I'll run and hitch up and bring the team while you are dressing!"

When Merry Andrew reached the road again, she saw far down beyond Brown's two gleaming eyes which threw their rays ahead through the wet night. In thankfulness she cried out, "Wully McNab!" and awaited the onslaught of the machine. The eyes glared upon her as they approached and she swung her shawl and called, "Wully! Wully!" and the car stopped almost within its own length.

"It's Merry Andrew! Grandfather is dying! Will you turn around and take Mr. Pudney for Dr. Ames, oh,— just as quick as you can?"

Wully McNab uttered some forceful ejaculation under his breath and then — "Look out, Andy; I'm turning!" Around swung the car just as Mr. Pudney arrived, still buttoning on his clothing.

"Wully will take you —" began Merry Andrew.

"Pile in!" commanded Wully, and even before Mrs. Pudney, who had followed her husband as fast as possible, could reach the gate, the car with a roar plunged into the night.

"Is Pudney in that car?" gasped Mrs. Pudney, but Merry Andrew did not answer. She had crouched upon the ground and was sobbing out a prayer of thankfulness that Wully had been coming home at such an opportune time.

"Is it a stroke?" demanded Mrs. Pudney. "Well, whatever it is, I shall probably be a widder as soon, if not sooner, than your grandmother is, with that car goin' at that rate. And Pudney's never been in one. I have, and Dorothy has, but he never has."

"I must run!" exclaimed Merry Andrew, rising suddenly.

"Wait an' I'll go over with you. But I got to go in first and tell the young ones what's up. They're frightened almost to death."

"I can't wait. And you'd better not come, Mrs. Pudney; you can't do anything to help, and now that the doctor will be here so soon — no, Mrs. Pudney, don't come!"

"Oh, yes, I will; I've never seen anybody with a stroke."

"It isn't a stroke."

"Why, what else could it be — so sudden like?"

"It's his rheumatism gone to his heart we are afraid."

"Well, if that's the case, he'll never git up. They never do, and he's pretty old —" But Mrs. Pudney found herself talking to the rain; Merry Andrew was gone.

Sylvia met Merry Andrew at the door, her eyes swollen, her hands shaking with cold and excitement, but with an expression of hope on her face.

"Better!" she called. "Breathing quite naturally again and asking for you."

Without a word Merry Andrew ran by her sister and up the stairs to her grandfather. She clasped his cold old hands in her own burning ones.

"Now don't you worry a minute, Grandfather," she scolded. "Don't you dare worry! You just lie right here and be sick like a good boy. Wully McNab and Mr. Pudney have gone for Dr. Ames and by the way they started off they'll be back in about two minutes, and Dr. Ames will know just what to do for you. And don't you worry about things out doors; I'll see that things go right in the barn. You know that I can do it. You just lie right here and take it easy and get good and well again before spring's work begins, will you? Wully McNab will have Doc Ames here before you can say Jack Robinson, and the doctor will give you something to straighten you out —"

"I — don't want to be straightened out," joked

Grandfather feebly, and Merry Andrew fondled his hands and kissed them, and could not for the life of her keep her tears out of sight.

They persuaded Grandmother to lie down on Mother's bed until the doctor came, and before they could get her persuaded, and down, and comfortably covered, the doctor came, muttering hard words at Wully McNab for his manner of driving an automobile.

"I don't mind his swearing," Wully assured Merry Andrew, "and what's one doctor, more or less! You ought to see how they're turning 'em out at the medical colleges. But I did have a thought of Pudney, because he's the only bass singer in Rosedale County that I know of. But didn't I get 'em here, though, Andy, eh? The mud flew, let me tell you!" He took out his watch. "Best time I've ever made yet, and raining cats and dogs, too. Pudney says that he doesn't like a machine; that he'd rather walk. He suggested walking two or three times on the way back, but I wouldn't let him out, and he's here. He's back all right without a scratch. Of course there's some risk in driving as I did tonight over a country road, and sometimes folks get smashed, but more often they come through. How is your grandfather, now, Merry Andrew?"

In a shuddering fascination Pudney watched Wully's departure for town with the doctor.

“There he goes again,” he commented, “and I’m glad I ain’t aboard. My wife says she’d ruther have one of them things than a piano, but if any one should give me one I’d smash it with the axe. They ain’t safe and nobody shall git me into one agin! So the old man is feelin’ better, is he? Well, then, I’ll be git-tin’ back home. My laigs are a shakin’ yet with that ride.”

CHAPTER XIII

In the Rosedale neighborhood when there is sickness in a house the neighbors call. The custom is not always the comfort it is supposed to be; nor is it always actuated by the spirit of friendliness with which it is accredited. Mrs. Pudney, for instance, insisted upon making whispered suggestions in regard to Grandfather's funeral. She favored holding it in the church, as better form than a home funeral. She wondered if, when the street-car company got to running, they would put on a funeral car. To Merry Andrew's frenzied assertions that Grandfather was improving, she shook a knowing head. They always went that way — one day better and the next day worse, until the end.

"Old Griggs went that way. And that old man Mortland — you remember — lived over by the mill. And what is the use of blinding your eyes to what has to be? You might as well make the best of it."

"And the most of it, I suppose you think!" flared Merry Andrew, who was immediately suppressed by Mother and Sylvia and escaped to the barn in a tremor of fear and anger.

Frequently Mrs. Pudney varied her mortuary conversation by a turn into economic paths: What did

the Drew women think of doing when Grandpa Drew was gone and old McNab took over the farm on the mortgage, as he surely would? Of course, she supposed Sylvia — and her mother, too, perhaps — might teach music, if they could get pupils, although a woman had told her that you couldn't throw a potato in any direction in Bendon without hitting a music teacher. They were as thick as spatter. Grandmother was too old to amount to much at earning her keep, and Merry Andrew had always been just a farm hand and nothing else; what could she do?

Merry Andrew would rush to the night's milking with a brain seething with Mrs. Pudney's suggestions. There among the sweet-smelling mows, while faithfully performing her heavy tasks, she fought out bitter battles with her resentment at Mrs. Pudney's harpings, and her own despairing forebodings that the predictions might be verified.

Grandmother wilted visibly, and adjusted herself with grim complacency to face the worst. To Merry Andrew's horror she removed the bunch of pansies from her toque and substituted a shapeless mass of black ribbon. Sylvia and Mother scurried about like pale, overwrought little ghosts, doing patiently and efficiently the thousand and one duties which awaited their hands, in the sick-room, in the kitchen, in the living-room where the callers were received and their questions answered. Occasionally Boy and Twoboy,

straggled in, to be broomed out immediately by Grandmother after having succeeded in leaving a muddy trail across the kitchen floor. Once they had even penetrated as far as the parlor bedroom where Grandfather had been installed, and where their mistress had crept before them, all odorous of rain, and hay, and chopped feed. She had the forethought to boost them, one after the other, out of the bedroom window, thereby saving them much humiliation and some pain. They enjoyed the proceeding immensely. They were pleased to find Grandfather once more, and accepted the boosting as a brand new game devised by Merry Andrew for their especial amusement.

Mrs. McNab and Gene brought jelly and currant wine, and the excitement of their coming and going proved a beneficial diversion to Grandmother's gloom-centered mind.

Bob Clyde drove, or walked, out from Bendon so frequently that young Wully McNab complained he could not get into the Drew house without stepping on Bob Clyde either coming or going. Wully offered his services and refused to be offended when Merry Andrew brusquely declared that he made more bother than he brought help, and that when there was anything he could do she would not be backward about calling on him. He even offered to milk Ambrosia if Merry Andrew would hold the cow's tail and her hind legs.

Mr. McNab, senior, came also — just once, about two weeks after Grandfather was stricken. On the same evening young Wully, appearing suddenly in the kitchen, found Bob Clyde already there, flushed and disturbed-looking, and with him Merry Andrew, the latter with the unmistakable evidences of a storm lingering upon her telltale features.

“What’s the rip?” demanded Wully. And although Merry Andrew regarded him with an unwelcoming gaze, she was softened by his evident fear of hearing bad news from the sick-room. “Isn’t worse, is he, Andy?”

“He is getting along nicely,” Merry Andrew assured him icily. Bob Clyde looked if anything more distressed than at first. Wully seated himself upon the corner of the kitchen table, from beneath which appeared a dog’s welcoming nose accompanied by a tonguey, tooth-trimmed grin. Wully fondled the dog.

“One member of the family glad to see me anyhow,” he commented and sighed deeply. Merry Andrew still regarded him stonily. Sylvia came from the direction of the bedroom with an empty tray. There was no room to doubt that Sylvia had been crying.

“How is the grandfather?” asked Wully again, evidently thinking he had misunderstood Merry Andrew.

“He has been quite a little better all day,” said Syl-

via. "Grandmother is sitting with him now. Would you like to go in and speak to him?"

"Thanks, no; not to-night."

"Well," said Bob, rising and making ready to go, "I'll see what I can do in regard to that matter, Merry Andrew. Good night."

"Good night," said Sylvia, and Merry Andrew followed Bob out, closing the door behind her with a bang.

"Nice weather — for March," said Sylvia in a very apparent effort to make talk.

"But cold!" shivered Wully. "Dreadfully cold!"

"Why, do you think so? The eaves were running just before dark."

"Possibly; the eaves are out of doors. If you should bring those eaves into this room they wouldn't run. Bur-r-r-r! Terribly chilly in here." Sylvia got up and began politely to stir the fire.

"Come closer to the stove," she invited. Wully accepted the proffered chair.

"You are sure your grandfather is better?"

"Decidedly better. He has quite an appetite to-day."

"And your grandmother is well?"

"As well as can be expected. She has worried a great deal, of course."

"And your mother —?"

"Is upstairs lying down. She will sit up with Grandfather to-night."

Merry Andrew returned and came and spread her hands above the stove.

"Are the dogs all right?" persisted Wully.

"You can see for yourself," replied Sylvia.

"Bur-r-r-r!" shuddered Wully. "How is Ambrosia? Let me se-e-e — she became a mother last week, didn't she? Bur-r-r-r — but it's cold!"

Merry Andrew's mood seemed to be approaching some sort of crisis.

"Bob Clyde boarding out here now?" asked Wully politely. Nobody answered and nobody smiled; the air remained charged with gloom.

"I thought possibly he was," went on Wully. "Every time I come in I meet Bob just coming out. So nice and near his place of business I thought he might be boarding out here."

"I wonder, Wully McNab, if you will ever get old enough to find out that life isn't a joke!" burst out Merry Andrew.

"There, there," soothed Wully, "now it's beginning to seem natural again. It's showing signs of life. Perhaps now one may inquire what in thunder the trouble is here!"

Sylvia broke in hastily.

"There isn't any trouble — at least, not any that we can talk about, Wully —"

"A moment, please." Wully held up a hand in a mock ministerial manner. "Haven't I galloped across the wastes a good deal lately bearing jellies and hot water bags and saltpeter and senna and so on?"

"You've been just as good as you could be, Wully," acknowledged Sylvia gratefully.

"Well, doesn't such angelic goodness entitle me to some sort of confidence when trouble is afoot in the Drew family? When your grandfather was taken sick, you didn't hesitate to tell me about it. But now, by your own admission, all is well, or at least getting better, yet when I step inside the door Andy bats her eyes at me like a little black gamecock."

"A family may have troubles which they can't talk over with outsiders —" began Sylvia.

"A moment, my young friend," expostulated Wully with the drawl which usually broke the ice where Merry Andrew was concerned, "answer just one more question and I will adjourn the session: Were you, or were you not, talking over this mysterious trouble with Bob Clyde when I came in?"

The girls looked at each other guiltily.

"If so," continued Wully, still in his character of exhorter, "since when did Bob Clyde become so much more of an insider to this family than is Wully McNab?"

"That depends on which Wully you refer to!" Merry Andrew thrust forth the words like a dagger.

"Merry Andrew!" warned Sylvia.

"I'm going to tell him the whole thing!" declared Merry Andrew suddenly, standing up straight and "batting her eyes" at Wully again.

"Merry Andrew, don't!" pleaded Sylvia, but Merry Andrew was started and nothing could stop her.

"You've been good, Wully, and your mother has been good, and your sister Gene has been an angel; but your father has been as mean as pusley!"

Wully ceased suddenly to be a minister or an exhorter, and became just Wully McNab with his mouth sagging ajar in astonishment.

"He knows Grandfather has had a hard pull, and in all probability won't be able to work at all this spring—if ever again—" Her voice trembled—"so he drops in friendly like to tell us that he doesn't intend to renew the mortgage. He has offered to take the farm over for the face of the mortgage and fifteen hundred dollars cash—Think of it! Fifteen hundred dollars for eighty acres of the best kind of land—"

"The land is worn out," broke in Sylvia.

"—and this dear old stone house—mind you, not matched boards like Pudney's—"

"The house is all out of date," pleaded Sylvia.

"—and a barn—"

"It will cost five hundred dollars to put the barn into usable shape, Mr. McNab says," witnessed Sylvia.

"And Grandmother has accepted his offer!" went on Merry Andrew in a stormy tremulo. "Three thousand dollars for this property; think of it! Grandmother says a thousand dollars will buy us a little house in Bendon, and five hundred will keep us going until we girls can find work! She's thinking of some nice snug place in somebody's kitchen for me, I presume!"

"But, Merry Andrew, dear, what do you want to do?" cried Sylvia. "I don't believe Grandfather will ever be able to work the farm again —"

"Of course he won't; but I could work it! I was bred to it; why shouldn't it be bread to me? I don't know enough to cook, nor to teach, nor to clerk, but I could run a farm, and I know it! Dorothy Pudney couldn't do it. Neither could Gene McNab nor Sylvia Drew. Mary Ann Drew could, if she had the chance! But now the chance is to be taken away from her, she can scrub kitchen floors, or work in the glove factory in Bendon!"

"What do you want to do?" reiterated Sylvia.

Merry Andrew strode to the door and flung it open for the collies, who were panting from the effects of Sylvia's extra fire. They plunged out joyously. Even in her highly-wrought mood Merry Andrew remembered Grandfather and closed the door noiselessly.

"I want the mortgage renewed for a year. That

would give me a chance to break the colts and have a new, strong team to help out the old one. I want two or three thoroughbred cows to put in with our fifteen grade cows. I want a cream separator, so that we can sell our cream and milk as other farmers do — for good money, instead of slopping it into common pigs and then selling the pigs in the fall for whatever some old stock buyer pleases to give us, as we always have done. I want a silo — oh, I want a silo!" Suddenly the emotions which had been seething in Merry Andrew's soul burst all bounds and culminated in sobs. She tumbled upon the calico lounge in a palpitating heap.

Wully, who had not uttered a word since the accusation launched at his father, still sat perched like an owl on the corner of the kitchen table. Mrs. Drew's pale face appeared at the hall door.

"What is the matter with Mother's little girl?" she demanded, sitting down on the lounge at Merry Andrew's head and caressing the tumbled locks.

"She's crying for a silo," said Wully gently, and as if that were the commonest thing in the world for girls to want. The shoulders upon the lounge heaved anew, but Mother and Sylvia judged by the accompanying gurgle that, at last, Wully's fooleries had struck a vulnerable spot in Merry Andrew's armor of grief and despair, and that her tears were mixed with hysterical laughter.

CHAPTER XIV

The day after Merry Andrew's brainstorm was quite a notable one in the Drew family. In the morning they brought Grandfather out into the parlor, where he sat, all pale and trembly, but cheerfully anxious to take hold on life once more. He asked that his chair be placed near the east window where he could see "down the road to Bendon." He said weakly that he must have Pudney go to town to look for a hired man for him, as spring's work would begin soon now, and he was afraid he would be but a poor stick at it for awhile.

Out in the shed-room an earnest consultation took place in regard to telling or not telling Grandfather about McNab's offer.

"It would kill him to tell!" declared Merry Andrew.

"It would relieve his mind of anxiety!" breathed Grandmother through pursed lips.

"But think of having to move, this kind of weather," said Mother, "for, of course, Mr. McNab would want to get a tenant into the house and settled before spring opens."

Merry Andrew groaned.

"We must manage to keep him from seeing Pudney

for a few days if we can without making our effort too conspicuous," warned Mother. "He will ask Pudney to hire a man for spring's work, and there is no use in hiring a man if —" Again Merry Andrew groaned. Mother, too, had given up, then. Apparently there was nothing to be done.

"Mother" — Merry Andrew tried to speak calmly — "what are we going to do in Bendon?" Grandmother answered:

"In Bendon we shall have to do what we have always done here — work!"

Merry Andrew saw Sylvia telegraphing a warning above Grandmother's head, and having reached the limits of her self-restraint she stalked majestically out of doors, where Sylvia presently followed.

Around the corner came Evangeline Pudney, cantering bovinely. She was making for the back door, her tongue flapping in the breeze, when Merry Andrew stayed her flight.

"What's wanted, Evangeline?"

"Pa sent me to get his everyday mittens. He left 'em over here."

"When?"

"Just now."

"Where is your pa?"

"Gone to town." Merry Andrew relaxed her hold and Evangeline disappeared within the house.

"Wouldn't that scotch you!" demanded Merry An-

drew tragically. "Just while we were out there in the shed-room Pudney comes like a thief in the night, gets Grandfather's order for a hired man and hikes for Bendon!" Sylvia ticked her 'despair with her tongue.

"I'm afraid we ought to have told Grandfather what Mr. McNab said about the farm —"

"We won't have to!" broke in Merry Andrew bitterly; "here comes the little bird who will tell him in spite of us!"

A dust-colored cap was visible above the top board of the orchard fence. Its owner, Wully McNab, Senior, was unmistakably making for the Drews' back door. As he approached, Merry Andrew sent forth a stormy glance to meet him.

"Wouldn't you know by the way his ears flange out that he was the meanest man on the footstool?"

"Oh, I do wish he would let Grandfather alone for a few days!" lamented Sylvia. "Just until he gets a little stronger. It's going to be a terrible shock to him at best; but in his weakened condition — but there, Merry Andrew, don't — don't look that way. Don't 'bat your eyes like a game chicken,' as Wully McNab accused you of doing!"

"You go on in and let me tend to him! He shall not bother Grandfather today."

"Don't be saucy to him, Merry Andrew, for Wully's sake, and for Gene's, and for Mrs. McNab's. And

remember, he himself has done nice things for us in the past —” She had time to say no more; Mr. McNab was already grunting a good morning. She slipped within to tell Grandfather that Mr. McNab was coming to see him.

“I’m glad of it,” said Grandfather, “I want to see McNab. Ought to have seen him before about that interest money. He will have to wait awhile for it, I’m afraid. And the mortgage will have to be renewed this spring, too. I hope McNab will understand how it is; and I guess he will.”

Sylvia’s lips trembled and she turned to the window to hide her emotion. Out in the path which led to the barn she could see a corner of Merry Andrew’s skirt, and, now and then, a vigorous hand circling in a dramatic gesture. Could it be that Merry Andrew was taking Mr. McNab to task in such a reckless manner? Sylvia slipped into the bedroom. From the bedroom window she could see, all too plainly, Mr. McNab standing silent, hands in his pockets, old weather-beaten ears slanting outwards to support his cap, eyes squinted, thin, stubbly-bearded lips close shut, listening in what appeared to Sylvia stubborn silence to Merry Andrew, who might have been making a Fourth-of-July oration. Now she spread both hands towards the cornfield as if she might have been declaiming, “Our Glor-r-r-i-o-u-s land of the f-r-e-e-e!” Now she swept one palm upward in the direction of the roof of the barn. “Our

beloved flag-g-g!" Sylvia found herself fitting the oration to her sister's gestures. Whatever the nature of Merry Andrew's declamation she was certainly holding her audience. "In yonder miserable prison where our bra-a-ave boys died —" supplied Sylvia —

"I've sent to town for a hired man, Sylvia," called Grandfather from the parlor.

"Yes, Grandfather."

"Pudney may bring one out with him tonight."

"Oh! We — I'll get his room ready, then," replied Sylvia faintly. What was Merry Andrew doing? Trying to hold off Mr. McNab? And what could be the nature of the speech she was delivering? Whatever it was she was drawing it to a close with a final all-embracing sweep, a churning motion of the hands, a final folding of her arms across the front of her blouse.

"Ladies and gentlemen, I thank you!" murmured Sylvia, and would not have been surprised to see Mr. McNabb clap his old chapped hands in applause.

She had no opportunity of seeing, for Grandmother had come in and was trying to persuade the invalid to go back to bed.

"You must not waste your strength, Lyman," she was pleading mournfully, "for you are going to need every thread of it in the next few days." And he was trying to tell her how, fortunately, he had seen Evangeline in the lane, and had tapped on the window,

and had told her to call her father over, and Pudney, luckily, was all harnessed for town and —” But Grandmother broke in:

“Oh, dear, we shan’t need any hired man, Lyman —” and then Sylvia interrupted before Grandmother had a chance to explain why they should not need a hired man.

“Mr. McNab is coming in the back way,” she announced, and Grandmother was all in a flutter at once.

“Dust up those ashes in front of the stove, Sylvia,” she commanded. “I must slip upstairs and get a fresh apron!”

Grandmother returned with a fresh apron and a varnished smoothness upon her front hair, yet Mr. McNab had not appeared. They put Grandfather to bed in spite of his protest that he would rather be sitting up when McNab came in. Grandmother straightened the sheets, changed the bureau cover and made sundry other fidgety preparations before she stepped to the bedroom window to peer out. She turned a mildly accusing glance upon Sylvia.

“I thought you said Mr. McNab was coming?”

“He was,” responded Sylvia, and gazed out of the parlor window. No McNab, no Merry Andrew in sight.

“I must see McNab,” reiterated Grandfather from the bed. “I must make arrangements about the interest on the mortgage. The four heifers coming into

milk this spring must be sold to pay that interest. I thought maybe McNab would take 'em on the interest debt; they're fine animals, and ought to bring — well, they ought to bring thirty dollars apiece. But if McNab will take the four of 'em for the interest, I'll let him have them. Then I won't need to worry about debts until I get a little stronger."

"Lyman," said Grandmother, as if under pressure of a sudden resolution, "I think you ought to be told! When a person is getting up from a bed of sickness good news is often a benefit. You won't have to worry over that mortgage any more. Mr. McNab thinks best to take over this place and pay us fifteen hundred dollars in cash for our equity — I think that was the word he used — equity —" Grandmother went no further.

"Oh, dear! Oh, dear!" moaned the sick man pitifully. "It's come — it's come, then! Just what I have been afraid of! Oh, to lose it — after — strugglin' all these years — to lose it at last! And without my farm what can I do to earn a living? And what can Merry Andrew do! Oh, dear — o-h — dear!" With a long fluttering wail he turned on his pillow and lay very still.

Sylvia ran into the hall and screamed frantically to her mother.

"Oh, come quick, Mother! It's all back again — the sickness — the terrible lack of breath!" Mother

came running down stairs as Merry Andrew came in at the back door.

"What is it?" cried out Merry Andrew, but she knew before Sylvia answered. They all rushed together to the sick-room. Grandmother was supporting Grandfather, who sank heavily in her arms. Both old faces were pallid, the woman's if anything the more so. Merry Andrew ran forward and snatched her grandfather's shoulders into her own embrace. It really seemed to be death which was claiming him, but she dragged him back.

"Grandfather! Grandfather!" she wailed, "you must not — you must not look like that! You must get better and help me save the farm! Here is Mr. McNab — come to renew the mortgage — oh, Grandfather, come back! Come back!"

He opened his eyes and smiled feebly. The girl reiterated her news and her frantic appeal. The reiteration caught and held the dimming intelligence of the sick man. His eyes wandered beyond the faces of his family to that of McNab, who stood in the bedroom door.

"I — don't — care — to sell," whispered Grandfather.

"Why — ceairtinly, I don't want to buy if you don't want to sell, Dhre-e-w. Your gr-r-randdaughter has just been tellin' me she thinks she can r-r-run the fairm, an' I've no doot she can; she seems able to

carry oot whatever she put her hawnd to. Br-r-r-ace up, Dhr-r-ew — brace up!”

For an hour Merry Andrew sat on the bed, holding her grandfather's shoulders, chafing his hands and chattering, chattering constantly, of silos and thoroughbreds and barns and seeders. It was going to be a picnic! A long, lively picnic! He lying around taking things easy, she, with things all her own way, making money like dirt! Just like dirt! Now he mustn't go and kick it all over by getting worse — no, indeed! She needed, not his work, but his advice and oversight.

Afterwards, Grandmother said it was the medicine which the doctor left which brought him through.

“No,” said Mother gently, “it was Merry Andrew's talking business which brought him through.”

“But it was talking business which seemed to bring on the spell,” insisted Grandmother, herself white and drawn and pitiful.

“Different sort of business,” said Merry Andrew. “Yours, Grandmother, was the business of failure; mine, of success. More men go to their death through purse failure than the doctors will admit. They call it heart failure, and hardening of the liver, and so on, and, of course, I suppose those are as good names as any for the finish, but the beginnings are in discouragement and lack of hope. And I want to read the riot act right here and now, folks: Unless we can

keep Grandfather chirked up and hopeful, we're going to lose him!" She glared at Sylvia as though it had been she who had toppled Grandfather over, and Sylvia bowed her head meekly and said never a word. It was not the first time she had acted as buffer between the belligerent members of the family. They were upstairs in Grandmother's room where Mother had persuaded her to lie down. Mother was watching with Grandfather, who seemed to be sleeping quietly and naturally.

"And so you expect to keep your grandfather alive by telling him falsehoods," accused Grandmother from the bed.

"No falsehood about it," boasted Merry Andrew. "Mr. McNab has decided to renew the mortgage. Not only that, but, if I have my way, he is going to double the mortgage; he is going to make it three thousand instead of fifteen hundred, and then, a year from now, he can take over the whole enduring thing and we can move to the poorhouse in a bunch. But I believe it is going to save Grandfather."

"Nice silly business!" breathed Grandmother, and waived further comment in view of the fact that, whatever Merry Andrew's scheme, Mr. McNab seemed to sanction it.

"Now you go to sleep if you can," Merry Andrew made a feint of tucking her grandmother up. "Grandfather is better and after you have had a good

rest we'll talk things over and I'll tell you what Mr. McNab said."

In the sitting-room Sylvia faced her sister.

"Well, McNab isn't the heartless old pirate you believed him to be after all, then, Merry Andrew?"

"Yes he is; he's heartlesser!"

"But he is going to renew the mortgage."

"He is going to take up the mortgage, and if I can coax Grandfather into it, he is going to hold one double the size."

"What do you mean?"

"I'm going to run this farm for a year, but — I've got to have something to run it on. He is going to lend me fifteen hundred dollars more. Then the mortgage will be three thousand, and he says a year from now he will take up the slack — farm, stock and all."

"Mary Ann Drew!"

"Yes, that's what he said. He says no woman knows enough to run a farm, let alone a sprig of a ga-i-r-r-l —, that's what he called me. But he says the farm and stock will still be worth three thousand dollars, even after I've fuddled with 'em a year. If Grandfather consents, and I know he will, I'm going to try it anyhow."

"How did you ever have the courage to broach the subject, Merry Andrew?"

"I didn't. He did it himself. He said he had changed his mind about taking up the mortgage. I

mentioned that I had money in sight with which to buy some more stock — you know — what Bob Clyde thought he could do for us in that line — but he seemed to want to hold all the mortgages himself. He asked me what I would do with the farm if I had my own way and — say — fifteen hundred dollars to do with. I told him. Then he said he stood ready, provided Grandfather was willing, to lend that much more on the farm and stock. He said I must not for a minute get the idea that he was lending money through charitable motives, or because he thought I could run the farm. He was certain I wasn't as smart as I thought I was, and he was certain that he should be obliged to take over the place next spring.

“He said he supposed I was too set in my way to take any advice from a man who had farmed it all his life —”

“When did he get a chance to say all that?” broke in Sylvia. “Whenever I looked out I saw you talking like a Fourth-of-July speaker, and he looking sort of — well — overwhelmed, you know.”

“That was when I was telling him what I would do if I had the farm and fifteen hundred dollars to work with; but when we went to the barn to look over the stock he said all he had to say and I listened. As I was telling you, he intimated that I was too young to appreciate advice from those older and more experienced than myself. I told him that, under the circum-

stances — his having all the money at stake — I would be a gump not to weigh his advice pretty carefully. And I shall, too. Mr. McNab is the best farmer and all-round business man in Rosedale. His advice is worth something."

"I'm awfully frightened for you, Merry Andrew."

"I'm frightened, too," admitted Merry Andrew. "I feel as you said you did about the church that time, that I have set some great machine going which can't be stopped until it runs down."

"But think how much more is at stake, Merry Andrew! Why, think of three thousand dollars!"

"But that isn't the first thing I must think about. I really needn't think about that for a year. The thing uppermost in my mind is fixing the barn; getting four head of blooded stock to tone up our old-grade outfit — you see, Sylvia, the farm as it stands is neither fish, flesh, nor fowl; it's just a place to work hard and earn nothing. I'm going to specialize. I'm going to make it a dairy farm. That is all you can do with eighty acres. Butter-fat! Butter-fat! That's the word which shall be inscribed on my banner."

"It's a dreadfully sordid motto for a young girl who, by good rights, ought to be dreaming of moonlight and music and — lovers," sighed Sylvia.

"Perhaps it is," owned Merry Andrew. "Yes, I dare say it is. Yet when I think of the life of a trained nurse, say, in a small-pox hospital, or being

lady foreman in a bomb factory, or any one of the ten thousand difficult and dirty jobs women do now-a-days, and do well, I would much rather be a farmer. It isn't any worse and it isn't any more indelicate. Funny part of it all is, that neither you, nor Grandmother, nor Mr. McNab, took any exceptions to my working in the fields and among the stock with Grandfather, so long as Grandfather was the boss and I did the labor. But when I aspire to the thinking and planning and scheming — the part Grandfather has failed in — why, everybody cries out indelicate. Dentistry isn't a pleasant profession; not on account of the tooth-pulling, but because of the washing up afterwards. But dentists don't do the washing up; attendants do it, and those attendants are always girls. The dentist draws the tooth and a good-sized fee; the girl does the repulsive work, and gets enough to buy her shoes while her parents furnish her board. It isn't any more indelicate to raise cattle and hogs which run into money than it is to breed chickens, yet the chicken industry of the farm has for generations been handed over to the women folks because there isn't much profit in it.

“Let Grandmother take care of the turkeys in her usual ladylike way, while I tackle the stock, whole hog or none! Who is this driving into the lane?”

“It is Mr. Pudney with our new hired man,” said Sylvia.

Merry Andrew bent a piercing gaze upon the top of

the jaunty cap which appeared beside Pudney's old battered felt hat.

"Hired man!" she ejaculated. "I would sooner think it was a fugitive prince from some one of the tottering monarchies of bleeding Europe!" And as she followed Sylvia downstairs she realized that her tremendous struggle was about to begin.

CHAPTER XV

Philip Starr was the name of the new hired man. He was an American, and wore a ring on his little finger. Merry Andrew viewed him with disfavor from the very first.

"I'm afraid I'm going to have trouble with that bit of machinery," she prophesied to Sylvia, after Starr had eaten a most comprehensive supper and lighted a cigarette. "I wish Grandfather hadn't been quite so prompt about detailing Pudney to get us a man. Hired men are scarce, I know, but I should have looked around pretty thoroughly before I settled on this specimen."

"You never can tell," encouraged Sylvia, "he may be a splendid hand; he's big and strong enough, mercy knows."

"He's strong, but awful smart. He's going to be one of the know-it-all sort. He might get along all right with old McNab, but the question is, will he tackle when I say sic! You must realize, Sylvia, that it is quite difficult for the average hired man to be bossed by a woman, say nothing of a girl."

Unfortunately Merry Andrew brought about the very condition she wished to avoid by trying to steer

clear of another, and more embarrassing one. Mr. Philip Starr, who, according to his own modest confession, had cut quite a figure in Bendon society, was, at first, inclined to be flirtatious with the Drew girls. He did not relish Merry Andrew's brusk way of putting him in his place. To complicate matters, Dorothy Pudney spent the evening at the Drews'. "Phil" was an acquaintance of hers. They had met at a Bendon dance not so long ago. She was in a whirlwind of giggles and repartee all the evening, and went home at a late hour convinced of the Drew girls' jealousy of herself. Merry Andrew waited up for some time, but went to bed at last without getting a chance to talk with her assistant.

At breakfast "Phil" inquired if "the old man" was able to see him.

"Of course," he added, "there ain't much to do at this time of the year."

"Nothing to do at this time of year!" burst out Merry Andrew, but choked back her indignation. This was not the proper time to enlighten Mr. Starr. He would soon find out, however, what was to be done at this time of year.

"Pudney says you've got a team of colts to break. I thought I'd start in an' break 'em."

Merry Andrew arose from her seat at the table, and Mother saw a row of white knuckles across the little hand gripping her napkin. But with the self-repres-

sion of a person assuming new and arduous responsibilities, she only announced that she would go in and see if Grandfather could talk business this morning. She was absent from the room for ten minutes; then she came back to say that Grandfather was ready for a conference.

"Either throw that away, or finish it before you go in," she commanded curtly, pointing at Philip's cigarette. "You mustn't smoke it in Grandfather's room."

"Gosh! is he as bad as that?" asked Starr, balancing his cigarette on the window sill. Merry Andrew showed him the way and returned, closing all three doors behind her.

"It's just as well to let Grandfather have this talk with 'it' alone," she told Mother and Sylvia. "Grandfather is to tell him, good and plenty, who is to be the boss around here for the coming year. Then if he doesn't take a tumble —"

She finished by blowing into the air an imaginary something — either thistle-down or hired man — from the tips of her thumb and forefinger.

"I'm glad you restrained yourself so well," her mother told her approvingly. "I was just afraid you were going to fly all to pieces when he mentioned breaking the colts." Merry Andrew made a mow of disdain.

"Break the colts! I nearly choked! But I held in,

didn't I, Mother? Oh, indeed I must learn to govern my own temper if I expect to be the foreman on a farm. If you can't run yourself, you're not fit to run other folks."

"What a pity you didn't learn that in your childhood!" breathed Grandmother in her hollow tone which always meant reproof.

Merry Andrew shut her lips tightly. She prided herself now-a-days upon her ability to "hold herself in," at least where Grandmother was concerned. The years had added much to her own dignity in the household, at the same time robbing Grandmother of a portion of her active authority. In fact, Grandmother was in something of a maze in regard to Merry Andrew's captancy. A heart-to-heart talk with Merry Andrew's mother, and another with Sylvia, failed to convince her that it was possible for a girl of Merry Andrew's age to run a farm. More than all, she was dazed at Mr. McNab's change of attitude, as, indeed, were the rest of the family.

After Philip Starr had finished a rather unsatisfactory interview with "the old man," one that convinced him that Mr. Drew was in the last stages of mental incapacity; and Merry Andrew had conducted him to the pigsty and instructed him in regard to the building of a separate pen which would be needed soon, she came back to the house to find her relatives talking matters over,

"I never knew of Mr. McNab giving in that way but once before," said Mother, "and that was in the matter of the church."

"Well, that showed that he could give in," laughed Sylvia.

"But why did he?" breathed Grandmother, giving full utterance to her own bewilderment. "He said he would buy if we were willing to sell, but that if we were not willing to sell at his price, he should be obliged to foreclose and let the sheriff do the selling. He said that, in his opinion, it was good business for us to sell —"

"Good business for him — yes!" broke in Merry Andrew.

"He said for us!" repeated Grandmother decidedly. Mother upheld Grandmother.

"It may be that it would have been better for us to sell for a certain fifteen hundred dollars, than to take chances on a year of hard work and losing the stock and machinery in the end."

"This farm as it stands today is worth eight thousand dollars if it is worth a cent!" blustered Merry Andrew, "and McNab was planning to take it over for three!"

"Don't forget the interest," prompted Mother. "Don't make it any worse than it is. But the mystery is, what changed Mr. McNab's mind."

"His natural sense of justice," said Grandmother

solemnly; "with all his — his — thrift, Mr. McNab is at heart a just man."

"Merry Andrew's eloquence," suggested Sylvia. "If you had seen her as I did — sweeping the horizon with both arms — What did you say to him, Merry Andrew; and what did he say to you? Were you really delivering a Fourth-of-July oration at him out there in the path as you swept your hands first to the blue vault of heaven and then out over the green reaches of the pasture?"

"Exactly. That was what I was doing, Sylvia; I was drawing Mr. McNab's attention to the land of the brave and the home of the free, namely the Drew farm. I told him a few pretty plain truths as we stood there in that path. I said, 'This place is worth pretty nearly three times three thousand dollars.' I said, 'Look at that lovely old stone house! A few shingles on the roof and it will be as valuable as it was the day it was finished — more so, for the stones are a fine old color now.' I said, 'And that barn; why, for two hundred and fifty dollars I could fix that barn so that it would outrank a good many barns in Rosedale County which pose for perfectly up-to-date dairy barns.' I said, 'If I had a little money I could run this farm and make a good living on it, not only for myself, but for my sister, my mother, my grandmother and my grandfather!'"

"That's what did it, you see," nodded Mother admiringly.

"But that's the funny part of it," owned Merry Andrew, "that wasn't what did it, for that conversation all took place after Mr. McNab had announced that he had come over to tell Grandmother that he was willing to renew the mortgage. My harangue might have influenced him to lend me — us, I mean — the added fifteen hundred dollars. But listen to my theory: Old McNab knows that this place is well worth nine thousand dollars, and that it won't be worth any less after we have put in another year of hard labor on it. He thinks that in the spring he will get, not only the land, but the stock and the machinery as well. And he stands a good chance, of course, of doing it if it wasn't for one fact that he doesn't know anything about."

"And that is," prompted Sylvia, her eyes shining, "that is —"

"Bob Clyde's offer to get the money from somebody else with which to take up the mortgage," finished Merry Andrew with triumph. "Wully McNab doesn't own all the money in the world, thank fortune —" She paused with arms outspread as the door swung open to admit Mrs. Pudney.

"What's up?" demanded the caller. "You folks havin' a fight? I could hear Merry Andrew a talkin' before I got round the corner of the house."

Sylvia set a chair and Mrs. Pudney dropped into it. She was not in her usual morning attire. Indeed, her state of tidiness amounted almost to a disguise. Merry Andrew reflected how much younger a woman looks in a clean collar and with her hair combed.

"I come over to ask after Gran'pa Drew, and how you liked the new hired help."

"Grandfather is a great deal better," said Mother, "and as to the man, we haven't had him long enough as yet to know how we are going to like him."

"Well, you're lucky to git him. I didn't s'pose Phil Starr would come down to doin' farm work. He's a A number one pitcher, you know. I bet you lose him when the baseball season opens. He said over to our house last night that he wouldn't have hired only he knew old man Drew was bedrid, and he would have the runnin' of the place. He said it would be like ownin' the place — havin' the whole say, that way."

In a sort of cold horror the eyes of Sylvia and Mother sought those of Merry Andrew. They found her "holding in" valiantly.

"Phil is one of the best dancers I ever took the floor with," sighed Mrs. Pudney, a reminiscent smile of pleasure curving her mouth.

"That won't be of much advantage at milking time," said Merry Andrew. "Ambrosia doesn't dance."

"Well, I just thought I'd let you know what sort of a fellow Phil is," Mrs. Pudney continued. "I thought it would be just as well for you women-folks to know that he won't stand any petticoat bossin'. He's all right, Phil is; he's awful smart, and he'll run the place, you betchye, up to the queen's taste; but he won't stand no bettyin' around — he says so himself. He says Drew is too old a man to run a farm like this anyhow; and I guess he's right. He says it needs a strong young man to boss a place like this. Pudney says he thinks that things are just goin' to whizz round here."

"I think, myself, that there is every indication that things are going to 'whizz' round here," confessed Merry Andrew, with a straightening of the lips which Mother and Sylvia always dreaded to see.

"And now I've got some real news to tell you." It was easy to see "the real news" was much to Mrs. Pudney's liking. "I guess we're goin' to sell out and go to town to live."

"To sell out!" echoed all the Drews together.

"Uh-huh. Mr. McNab has made us an offer, and I tell Pudney he'd better accept it. I'm sick and tired of workin' for the interest on old McNab's mortgage. I tell Pudney we can take what little there is left after payin' up our debts and start into some other business."

"What other business?" demanded Merry Andrew.

"Phil says he knows where there is a dandy restaurant for sale —"

"You and Dorothy to do the cooking?" inquired Merry Andrew, and although her face was sober and her manner all that could be desired, both Sylvia and Mother shot secret glances of warning at her.

"We should employ a chef, of course," Mrs. Pudney informed them with a twirk of the neck. "Dorothy and I are both sick of bein' hayseeds. Out here in the country you don't see nothin' and you don't know nothin'."

"But now that we are to have a streetcar right by our door," ventured Mother, "doesn't it almost seem as if the town were coming out to us? I hear of quite a number of Bendon families who are coming to live on this line where they can have a little more room."

"The truth of the matter is," said Merry Andrew after the caller had gone home, "old McNab has his clutch on 'em and they are obliged to get out. He is surrounding us, you see, but he hasn't vanquished us yet!"

CHAPTER XVI

Things began to whizz at the Drew farm, even as Mrs. Pudney had foretold, although in a somewhat different way from that outlined by Phil Starr. In place of "running the business" and taking the long periods of rest so essential to a good pitcher when recruiting for a hard season, Philip found himself driven to a degree of labor he had not deemed possible.

"That little black vixen" (so he spoke of Merry Andrew to his friends across the road) "was everywhere with her 'Hurry, hurry, hurry!' She don't stay in the house at all! Hangs around me all the time. One of these days I'm goin' to tell her what's what!"

Mrs. Pudney conveyed this threat to the Drews.

"You'll have to be a little careful of Phil or you'll lose him," she cautioned.

"I shouldn't wonder a bit if we lost him!" flashed Merry Andrew.

"You just can't git hired help this spring," Mrs. Pudney added, and Merry Andrew, knowing the truth of this statement, continued to "hold herself in."

Now and then she failed utterly; as on the day she caught Philip chastising Boy because the dog had re-

fused to "tackle" the Pierce cat who sometimes saw fit to hunt in the Drew barn.

"You! You whipping my dog?" raged Merry Andrew. Her color was gone, her face that of a little white fury. "If you ever dare touch one of my dogs again I'll send you packing!"

"I guess I can't get along here," returned Phil loftily. "I don't know as I care to spend my time on a farm where a woman is always bettyin' around!"

"No, you aren't fit; you're not enough of a gentleman! You ought to be at work somewhere with a ball and chain on your leg! You ought to be a nigger teamster's mule with a gad over your back and no oats in your box—" She stopped short, for there was Sylvia gazing at her sorrowfully, pityingly, as one whose faith in a leader had been shaken.

Merry Andrew went into the house and up to her room. She shut the door behind her. An hour later she came down, still pale, still shaken and very much ashamed, but once more mistress of herself and therefore of the world.

Phil Starr, on the other hand, could not rise above the quarrel.

"I never saw a livin' critter with a temper like that girl's got!" he complained one day to Wully McNab.

"Well-well!" mocked Wully. "What's given you such an idea?"

"Talk about men swearin'," said Starr. "I've be-

longed to a Bush League, and walked the fourth man when the bases were full, but, by Jinks! I never was abused in my life as I was abused the day I licked that dog! I've never been called such names as she called me that day!"

"Oh, ho!" howled Wully. "What did she call you? You licked one of her dogs, you say, and then she called you — say, sit down here on this board and tell me what she called you."

"She called me 'a nigger's mule'!" confided Phil, and waited for Wully's burst of indignation.

"Served you right," said Wully, "only it wasn't bad enough. Don't you know any better than to whip a collie?" Then Wully strolled away, leaving Phil with his mouth hanging open in astonishment.

Afterwards he told Dorothy Pudney that he had had two minds to "wipe up the barnyard with Wully McNab." But when Dorothy informed Wully of Phil's threat, Wully said that he had not noticed any such forward movement on Phil's part.

"Funny part of it is," added Wully, "that he could have done it without half trying. He has some biceps, has that big stiff, and a hand like a ham."

"And a head like one," added Merry Andrew. "I don't know how I'm going to stand it all through the summer."

In spite of the hired man trouble, things continued to "whizz." Lady Duroc Jersey had been installed in

the new sty. She and Lord Blessington, the full-blood Holstein-Friesian head of the herd, and the three new Holstein-Friesian cows, had swept away five hundred and forty dollars of the fifteen-hundred-dollar reserve.

"But they're worth it," triumphed Merry Andrew, viewing her new possessions with appraising eyes.

The day that the new stock came Grandfather, swathed like a Turkish Pasha, made his first trip to the barn.

"They're beauties," he owned, "but I'm awfully afraid, girl — awfully afraid. Live stock is uncertain!"

"Nothing ventured, nothing won," Merry Andrew threw back, but nevertheless went about with a bad case of the blues all day, and at night, after everybody was supposed to be in bed, stole out to the barn and listened fearfully to the placid chanking of her new possessions, patting their sleek rumps lovingly, where they stood in their stanchions.

Under Grandfather's and Merry Andrew's supervision, Pudney broke the colts, and Merry Andrew bought them their spring outfit, a strong new harness, thereby completely spoiling another hundred dollars, as she complained to her mother.

"We ought to have a new cultivator, and a breaking-plough; but these will have to wait until next year.

They will come with the silage-cutter and the gas engine. The year after that we shall have a tractor —”

“The year after next we shall be in the poorhouse!” groaned Grandmother. Grandmother groaned constantly now, and, as she often asserted, felt her reason tottering at the goings-on. Grandfather was in his dotage, Merry Andrew criminally reckless, “daughter-in-law” and Sylvia steeped in besotted ignorance — or carelessness, she didn’t know which to call it.

“No,” returned Merry Andrew, “I shall never bring up in the poorhouse; I shall head for jail. In fact, I’m headed that way now. Some day when I happen to have a pitchfork in my hand and Philip Starr is entirely unarmed, the fit will come upon me and I shall do the deed. Of course I shall regret it afterwards; I always do regret my sins when it is too late. If, on the other hand, I can stick it out until the end of summer, I shall be something approaching the angelic. On the west-road forty I am sowing seventeen acres of wheat, and on the east forty seventeen acres of clover; I am also going to put in hard corn and corn for silage, and in the orchard there shall be corn for soiling in the fall when the pasture gets short; there are to be cow peas and soy beans where they will do the most good; but more than all these, I am cultivating a great, great stock of patience in my own soul. I haven’t found Philip much good at ploughing, or sowing, or milk-

ing, or minding what I tell him to do; but in helping along with this soul crop of mine he is a prize-winner. Maybe that is why he was sent to this farm."

"What's he been doing now?" asked Mother in an absent-minded way. Mother's faith in Merry Andrew's management was growing stronger every day. She was beginning to feel that Merry Andrew knew somewhat of the plan she was trying to work out, and her own responsibilities and labors were so exacting that she was only too glad to be let off with a vicarious responsibility in the matter of outdoor affairs. She recognized Merry Andrew's imperative need of discreet ears into which she might pour her whimsical, half-jesting, half-earnest complaints. When Merry Andrew came in declaring that she could not wait to buy a tractor but must have it at once, armored like the war tanks, a car of Juggernaut, with which she might run down Philip Starr and utterly annihilate him, her mother merely giggled and went on with her bread-mixing, her chamber-sweeping, or her radish-planting, merely asking as on this occasion, "What's he been doing now?"

"Everything I tell him not to," accused Merry Andrew. "He has a perfect craze for doing my chores and letting his own go undone. He'll sit up nights to feed the thoroughbred calves, and because I warned him never to go near Ambrosia, he took a notion to milk her. Of course she kicked him sky high, busted

his hat and his thumbnail and stepped on his corn. He up with the milking-stool and was just going to lam her when I appeared and took the center of the stage. Says I, 'Philip, wait a minute; don't go on with that sermon you are preaching. You are using the words all in the wrong places anyway, but answer me this: Did you ever work for Smither's folks?' He said he didn't blank — blank — blank know whether he had or not, and what difference did it make? What did I want to know for? 'Well, I bet you have,' said I. 'Grandfather bought Ambrosia of Smither, and the minute you sat down at her flank she recognized you. Ambrosia knows that she has met you — or one like you — before. Ambrosia is merely paying old scores.' Says I, 'Philip, my king, after this you keep strictly away from that cow, and remember this: In the Drew barn a milking-stool is not a Zeppelin — a thing to fly in the air and destroy. I prefer that you use it for the purpose for which it was designed. Notice: it has three legs and is well adapted for sitting upon, but in the air it is uncouth and dangerous.' Oh, that Philip makes me sick!"

Merry Andrew spent her daylight hours in farm work of the roughest and hardest kind, not the least onerous that of prodding Philip Starr to a realization that his wages were to be earned; her evenings she passed at the living-room table scowling over long columns of figures; adding, subtracting, erasing, scowl-

ing, and going all over again. Often the figures were supplemented by sketches of a round, high building. "Leaning Tower of Pisa," Wully McNab named it. Merry Andrew referred to it respectfully as The Silo.

One Sunday morning the minister gave out his text — St. Luke, Chapter XIV — 28th and 30th verses: "For which of you intending to build a tower sitteth not down first and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it? Lest haply after he hath laid the foundation and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock him, saying, this man began to build, and was not able to finish."

Wully McNab, who had just distributed the anthem books, smothered a sudden burst of mirth in a cough and solemnly drew from his pocket a sheet of paper, holding it behind the organ in plain view of the choir. It was a sheet of silo elevations, surrounded by scattered figures which flew and circled about its towering top like homing birds. Whenever the minister repeated any portion of his text Wully unfurled Merry Andrew's drawing and Sylvia and Gene stuffed their handkerchiefs into their mouths to restrain their untimely emotions.

Merry Andrew succeeded at last in recovering her property and crumpled it into her coat pocket while Mr. Pudney looked on in uncomprehending scorn.

The wonder of the neighbors was Merry Andrew's first-aid cabinet. It occupied one whole side of the

tool-house and contained simple and effective remedies to serve in case of illness or accident among the animals. Even Charley Wohoskey, who had been sent by his father with the reversed instructions, "to lend a pitchfork from Drews' folks," was impressed by the arrangement. On his way home, proudly bearing his agricultural trophy to his father, he had met Wully McNab. In the evening Wully told of the ensuing conversation.

" 'Dat Merry Andy she is a funny feller. She got a doctor-house for de cows, by gosh! ' "

But even doctor-houses do not always avail. A tragedy, sudden and mysterious, descended upon the Drew barn. Lady Duroc Jersey, who had three days before become the mother of ten promising little Duroc-Jerseys, was found stiff and cold in death, her ten little orphans squealing and nuzzling for their breakfast.

Merry Andrew was in despair. It was not only the monetary loss of Lady Duroc Jersey herself, nor even the impending demise of ten little thoroughbred Duroc Jerseys which shocked her; it was the unexplainable mystery surrounding the taking off which baffled and discouraged her. At dusk the night before, Merry Andrew testified, the animal to all appearances had been well and happy; yet at the autopsy held by Pudney, Grandfather and Merry Andrew, the conclusion was reached that, judging from the rigidity of the

body and the starved state of the pigs, the death had occurred at least twelve hours before it was discovered.

"Must have been sunstruck," suggested Wully McNab, who, as was his habit, had dropped in on his way to Bendon. Merry Andrew had just arisen from a minute examination of the defunct's head and neck.

"More likely Starr struck!" she muttered, and stalked away to the house. She was struggling with a desperate sense of defeat. If those ten pigs were lost it would make a difference of two hundred and fifty dollars in the fall business statement. She had figured that statement a hundred times. Those hogs, each and every one, sold through newspaper advertisements for breeding purposes, were to have brought gilt-edged prices.

Merry Andrew's look of dazed discouragement cut her grandfather to the heart.

"Farmer's luck!" he muttered. "Drew luck!"

Mother tried to find some bright side to the situation; some little glimpse of silver at the edge of the cloud.

"Perhaps we may be able to save the pigs after all," she chirruped. "We may be able to find a mother for them."

"But that would take a week running around over the country, and long before that time they will have slept with their fathers!" declared Merry Andrew bit-

terly. "There aren't many little pigs at this early date."

Wully, from his favorite perch on the corner of the kitchen table, tried to extend some comfort.

"If you keep 'em alive until tomorrow night I'll take the machine and cover every inch of Rosedale County," he promised.

"You might not find what you were looking for in three counties," declared Grandfather, "and after you did, she might not be willing to mother these pigs. Animals are queer that way, you know."

"Well," said Merry Andrew, "I'll warm some milk and spoon it down them once around anyhow."

She set about her task and Wully wheeled away after admonishing her to "buck up" and watch out for the wet nurse.

Merry Andrew had promised to see a carpenter who was building a silo over at Stone's. She hitched the colts to the light wagon and drove away, her courage at low ebb. In her ears were the squeals of ten starving Duroc Jerseys, and in her heart the unwelcome suspicion that Philip Starr, either purposely or in one of his unreasonable tempers, had killed the pig. If her suspicions were borne out Philip must go. Better do two men's work herself than have the sneak about.

The interview with the carpenter on the subject of silos was more bewildering than enlightening, and at chore time Merry Andrew drove the colts into the

farmyard and got out of the wagon feeling as Grandfather sometimes looked upon his return from unsuccessful missions. Out from the barn to meet her stepped Wully McNab with the expression on his face of one who had accomplished what he had set out to do.

"You didn't find one, did you, Wully?" Merry Andrew was hoping in spite of herself.

"No." Merry Andrew's feeble hope expired. "It seems that you were right about its being early for pig families. I didn't find one, but I've built one. Come on in. You will be astonished to see how they take to their stepmother. She isn't pure-bred, you understand; she's pure board; not Duroc Jersey, but Buroak Mercy. Sylvia and your mother are out here laughing themselves into spasms. But the scheme works all right."

Merry Andrew hitched the colts and followed Wully to where, under the admiring eyes of Mother and Sylvia, ten little Duroc Jerseys standing on their hind legs, wiggling ten appreciative tails, partook of warm milk through the nipples of ten nursing-bottles held in a wooden rack which Wully had made.

"This one is an awful goose," chuckled Sylvia, swooping to lift and rearrange a contrary, grunting infant. "He will not keep his place!"

"Now don't think to invite me over to a pork roast next Thanksgiving and serve me with a slab off that!"

warned Wully. And then he dramatized: "' Let me help you to a little piece of the siding — just a shaving.' ' Thanks, not any more, Miss Drew; the last time I dined on a flying buttress it made me feel quite buildingous. So much sap and pine-pitch doesn't agree with me.' "

" Oh, Wully! " breathed Merry Andrew ecstatically, " did you think it up and make it? "

" I made it, " confessed Wully modestly, " but I did not design it. I saw the plan of it — of her, if you please — in one of father's farm papers. My passionate love of music caused me to take up the paper for a closer examination of the picture of a man behind something which, at first glance, I took to be an accordion. Ever since the dawnssants we used to have over in Swanson's granary I have loved an accordion, and if ever I have a house of my own it's the only musical instrument I shall allow in it. Yes, I took it for a picture of my favorite instrument, but instead, it was a hickory piggie, or an emergency hawg, as you might say. I threw the paper down in disgust, never dreaming of the hour when I should be chasing madly through dad's files of literature hunting for it again. When Wully Senior looks over his papers he'll think the thing came to life and rooted its way out. But I found it, and I made it, and if I do say it, the critter is absolutely pitchfork proof."

Everybody in the barn, including Philip Starr, looked sharply at Wully, whose face was simply a placid mask of innocence.

"I think you are just as good as you can be, Wully," murmured Merry Andrew. She was almost in tears. All that dreary day she had imagined her little Duroc Jerseys succumbing, one by one; but now, thanks to Wully's powers of assimilating ideas, linked with promptness and industry, they had, at least, a fighting chance. "I do hope that I shall never be mean to you again, Wully." She was giggling now, in a shame-faced effort to keep from weeping.

"Oh, I do hope so!" breathed Wully with exaggerated earnestness. "And meanwhile, my young friend, would you mind leading me to your justly-celebrated doctor-house for a drop of antiseptic for this thumb? Take a slant at it, will you? Is it broken, or just merely smashed? I'm not a good shot with a hammer."

Eventually Grandmother dressed the injured thumb; everybody helped with the chores; Wully stayed to supper, and through the evening, as was apt to happen after a period of depression, Merry Andrew experienced a relapse into reckless hilarity. Dorothy Pudney and her mother came over, and while Mrs. Pudney engaged Philip Starr in an innocuous, one-sided flirtation, the remainder of the company (barring Grandmother, who, because of the saving presence of

a McNab, endured the hubbub) tried to see how witty and silly and noisy they could be. Afterwards Wully was in the habit of speaking of the occasion as "the night of the pig party at your house when we had such a good time." Wully taught the three girls to dance the Highland Fling; Grandfather told some early experiences of his own which were vaudevillian in their funniness. At a late hour — late for farmer folk — they went in a body to take a reassuring look at the pigs before Wully started for home.

CHAPTER XVII

Grandfather, although much better and, despite Mrs. Pudney's predictions, seemingly on the way to health, was not able to walk as far as the church and back; therefore, against the Drew practice, the old grays were called into service to carry the family to the Corners. Merry Andrew had remained behind to help Philip with the chores. After his usual request to be allowed to drive the colts, and Merry Andrew's usual refusal to let the colts be driven, he had swung off afoot towards Bendon, and Merry Andrew had turned churchward.

She loitered along the west road. The way was sweet and she had plenty of time; it was April and the sun was shining — she resolved to put Philip Starr completely out of her mind; to forget the farm, the stock, all her daily cares and responsibilities; to get into a Sunday frame of mind and to remember only her "marcies," the blue sky, the smell of newly-turned furrows, the robin chirruping on the fence. She envied Sylvia her ability to drop quickly into a poetic mood. It took time for Merry Andrew to climb from the mundane into the fanciful, and it needed but a slight jar

of the thought-ladder by which she climbed to throw her back to earth again.

Just as she determined stubbornly to think of the sky, the robin, the perfume of the furrow, instead of Philip Starr and his overpowering desire to drive the Drew colts before the Pudney covered buggy, the jar came in the guise of Wully McNab Senior at the corner. Merry Andrew wondered if the sight of her was as unwelcome to Mr. McNab as was his appearance to her. He nodded brusquely.

"You're late," he remarked. "They'll be singin' without yeh."

"I think I shall be in time." She accelerated her step. So did McNab.

"Hoo's the fairm?" he inquired.

"Coming along nicely so far as I can judge."

"Good help?" Merry Andrew winced.

"Not as good as some I've read of." She smiled up into the old man's face.

"Umph!" he grunted. "There's the thruble now-a-days; everybody — man an' maid — too lazy to fairm it!"

"I could get along with plain laziness," admitted Merry Andrew. "Bartholomew Vonvolkenberg used to be lazy enough, but I wish I had him in place of this Philip Starr. I prefer a little laziness to so much smartness. Philip is quite a society man, according to his own account. He has gone to Bendon this morn-

ing as mad as a March hare because I wouldn't let him take the colts. Mr. Pudney has a buggy—I wish he hadn't—but he has, a buggy. It is quite a nice-looking buggy, but Pudney's old horses don't fit it very well. Phil thinks that our colts hitched to the Pudney buggy would make a 'swell turnout.' But he sha'n't drive our colts, especially on Sunday. To my thinking he isn't fit to pull a rein over a horse's back. Do you let your hired men drive your teams on Sunday?"

"Not while I'm awake!" replied McNab. "Not while I'm in my recht mind! The Sawbeth is for rest for beast as well as man. I would na let my own son dhr-r-ive my teams on the Sawbeth."

"Oh, well, it's different with your own son. Wully would not drive a horse to death, nor slash at him, nor jerk his mouth tender to make him 'show life.'"

"Humph!" returned McNab. "Wully likes to go fast. He has everything his own way now with the gas-wagon. I never-r-r drive it myself; I'm afeard o't. But Wully dhr-r-ives it as if the very Auld Nick was after him. Abominable, say I! Next he'll be doin' hurt to somebody, an' his auld dad will have the damage to pay; for Wully has nathing, an' never wull have! Wully is a whufflin' failure!"

Merry Andrew was distressed and looked it. She could not altogether deny Mr. McNab's accusation, and yet she felt tenderness and pity in her heart for young

Wully. And so she walked on in silence, the old man stubbing along by her side.

"He's altogether a good-for-naught," broke out Mr. McNab again.

"No, no, Mr. McNab, you're wrong there; Wully just hasn't struck his gait yet —"

"Man o' mighty! when is he goin' to str-r-rike his gait, as yeh call it? He'll never str-r-rike his gait as long as he has his mother and sister to r-r-un to! Why isn't he away lookin' for a gait to sthr-r-rike? But no, away he goes an' in two months or so he's back again. An' now he's quit goin' altogether. An' after promisin' this spring to get oot and be somethin' for good, either doctorin' or lawyerin' or something! He promised faithfully — 'Faither,' he says, 'if you wull' — well — do somethin' he'd set his mind on my doin' — 'if you will cough up for it' — that's the way he put it — 'if you will cough up, I'll get at the doctor business or the law, or — anyhow, some old job.' And I coughed up to please him, an' still he's just hangin' about, jumpin' an' skedaddlin' oop the hills and down the hills wuth that old steam kettel o' ours, an' never airnin' a cent nor savin' a cent!"

"He saved me a good many cents this spring." At last Merry Andrew was awake to defend Wully the best she might. McNab regarded her from the corners of his squinting eyes.

"Hoo's that?"

"Didn't he tell you about the wooden mother he made for my little Duroc Jerseys — ten of them, left orphans, and would surely have died if Wully McNab hadn't made a mother for them out of wood and nursing-bottles — didn't he tell you about it?"

"Never a wor-r-rd!"

"Well, there you have it. You see," went on Merry Andrew eagerly, resolved to put forth whatever slender testimony there was available in Wully Junior's behalf, "Wully shows you all the bad there is in him and none of the good." She went into details about the Duroc-Jersey affair, and old McNab listened attentively, almost eagerly, Merry Andrew thought. Before she had finished they reached the church steps, and she left Mr. McNab there talking to a neighbor while she hurried in to take her place in the choir, which she reached barely in time. Sylvia was already at the organ.

All through the first hymn Merry Andrew was wondering what boon old McNab had granted in exchange for Wully's promise to "be at the doctor business" without further delay.

When the hymn was done Wully wrote something on the margin of a Sunday-school paper and motioned his sister to deliver it to Merry Andrew. Instead, Gene read it herself, smiled broadly and rubbed it out with the top of a little pencil which she took from her bag. Wully pretended to be very angry. He tch-tched softly with his tongue and wagged his head hope-

lessly; then after a thorough search through his pockets, ostensibly for his handkerchief, in reality for another piece of paper on which to write another note, he snatched Gene's handkerchief, and in spite of her futile efforts to regain it without the knowledge of the minister or congregation, scrawled upon it in pencil, "I'm hungry. May I go to your house to feed?"

Failing to reach Merry Andrew, he tendered his message to Sylvia, who smiled and nodded an invitation.

"Awfully good of you folks to awsk me to dinnah," he gushed on the way home, as he and Merry Andrew bumped along on an improvised seat at the rear of the farm wagon.

"For once I'm glad to have you," Merry Andrew assured him with uncomplimentary frankness. "I want a chance to give you a good going over!"

"Oh, dear! I'm scared almost to death!" declared Wully in a quacking voice of simulated terror. "If Mr. Drew would only stop those careening hosses I'd climb out over the end-board of the wagon and get away!" He threw his feet over the board seat as if to escape. Merry Andrew would not giggle at his fooleries.

"Can't you — won't you, ever be serious, not for one moment, Wully McNab? Isn't there anything — why — solid about you — down somewhere underneath all your silliness?"

"Oh, my! This is horrible!" quacked Wully. "Oh, if your grandfather would only slow up a little so that I could get out — Whoa! Whoa!" he breathed.

"What's the matter, Wully?" demanded Sylvia, turning an appreciative face over her shoulder. She, at least, was in the mood for Wully's fun.

"I'm frightened at the speed we are making. Don't you think, Sylvia, we ought to labor with your grandfather for driving like this on Sunday?"

Grandfather, on the front seat, all unconscious of being laughed at, gave the reins sundry little encouraging jerks over the backs of the dreaming team while the wheels of the wagon barely turned. The corner of Grandmother's neck-shawl rose and fell gently in the fresh April wind as she and Grandfather talked over the sermon they had just heard.

"A ride like this — safe and slow — is good for you," joked Mother. "You are in the habit of riding too fast, Wully."

Arrived at the back door, Wully insisted on Merry Andrew accompanying him to the barn to see the stock. He declared his anxiety as to whether or no she was taking proper care of the wooden pig, or if there was need to communicate with the Bendon branch of the S. P. C. A. Much to his surprise Merry Andrew acceded to his request at once.

The barn doors, back and front, stood open, and the

breeze from the sweet south meadow sucked through, catching an added bouquet from the haymows as it passed.

"Your father says that you promised him to do something in return for something you wanted him to do, and then failed to keep your part of the bargain," accused Merry Andrew abruptly. "What makes you do that way, Wully? Your father thinks just oodles of you —"

"Humph! He must let concealment like a worm in the bud feed on his damask ears, then," and Merry Andrew, remembering the chewed appearance of Wully Senior's auditory organs, was decoyed into unwilling laughter which rather spoiled the effect of her harangue.

"When did you interview father on the subject?"

"We walked to church together this morning. He said you promised if he would let you have your way about some certain matter that you would go at some kind of work —"

"Did — he say what it was I made him promise to do if I promised to get to work?"

"No, but he said you hadn't kept your agreement and naturally he has lost faith in you."

"What did you say?"

"I? Oh, I smoothed the matter over the best I could. I couldn't say much in your defense because what he said about you was more or less true. You

do just flare around, and come, and go, and get sick of things, and —”

“So you hadn’t a word to say to dad in my defense.”

“I told him about your making that.” Merry Andrew indicated the outgrown wooden arrangement which had saved her cherished drove, where it stood against the mow.

“She’s about ready to kill, isn’t she?” he remarked. “Tender and juicy old thing! But don’t invite me. Saw her up and feed her to Philip. Or, I might touch her up a little, add legs and a pedal attachment — harp, you know — and music rack, and you could pass her off on the Historical Society as a heirloom spinet handed down from Colonial times —”

“No,” broke in Merry Andrew, “your father is right; there is positively nothing to you, Wully, save a pack of nonsense! And, as he says, whatever in the world is to become of you? You won’t talk sense nor do sensible things!”

“Well, what in thunder do you and father want me to do? Speak right up, little one; don’t be afraid.”

“We want you to go away somewhere —” Wully started down the path so briskly that Merry Andrew cast a fearful glance behind her, thinking that Ambrosia might be attacking in the rear.

“And what shall I do when I get ‘somewhere’?” Wully paused to inquire.

“Why, amount to something! Be a doctor, a law-

yer, architect, surveyor — anything useful! Your father seems to favor the medical profession, but I don't think he would mind, just so you begin to show some signs of life!"

"Miss Drew, did you ever do preparatory work in a medical laboratory? No? Well then, let me tell you, I have! There is one old gray tomcat that will stalk beside me to my dying day! And, thinks I, if the ghosts of patients hover round doctors that way how do they manage to keep their appetites! Nix for me on the doctor business! If half the population of the U. S. should be stricken with the measles I could not lay my healing hand upon 'em. I thought of osteopathy, but that's too hard work for a delicate thing like me; a surveyor, I understand, carries a chain for miles and miles; architecture and civil engineering I haven't investigated to any extent as yet. I may give them a whirl later on — after the fall rains begin and the car won't run, but now — why, in eight weeks it will be vacation time anyway; would you and the old man be heartless enough to cut me out of my summer vacation? Everybody takes 'em!"

"Oh, well," ended Merry Andrew impatiently, "I've done my best. I've laid the case before you. I felt I owed your father that much for all he has done for me."

"My dear young friend, you have did noble!" soothed Wully, patting the top of Merry Andrew's

Sunday hat. "You have did noble! And, honest, one of these days I'll take your advice and wing hence. You'll see me shoot through the atmosphere like a homing crane, and later, you and my folks will hear almost unbelievable tales of my exploits out in the great cold world."

"Oh, nothing will be too wild for us to believe about you!" sniffed Merry Andrew.

"Hark!" cried Wully, striking an attitude and grasping Merry Andrew's wrist. "Heardst thou not the summons?" Then he plunged forth, dragging Merry Andrew squealing behind him to the back door, where Sylvia stood calling them in to dinner.

CHAPTER XVIII

Work on the Drew farm had now assumed a businesslike regularity and hopefulness unknown under Grandfather's management. Under his rule there had been a good deal of haphazard hard work — hopeless hard work. There was still plenty of hard work, but already returns were coming in. In place of turning over the young heifers to pay the interest money, the new cream separator had been put in and the product of it used to pay the interest. Promptly at the end of the month Philip received the first installment of his wages and hurried to Bendon to relieve himself of it.

Sylvia bravely assumed her portion of the labor. She taught twelve piano pupils and a singing class, and whenever possible helped Merry Andrew with the out-of-door work, and Mother within doors. Grandmother enlisted to look after the poultry; the only part of farming operations which she considered fit for feminine hands. Always and ever, Merry Andrew consulted her grandfather, and, so far as Sylvia or Mother could see, never went contrary to his advice. If Mr. McNab hung over the line fence and fired a warning at her she heeded it, for she had come to understand its value.

"The only dark spot in the spring's work is Philip Starr," Merry Andrew complained.

"You'll have to stand that," her grandfather assured her; "that's always the weak spot in farming — hired help. But poor help is better than none. He knows enough to git the horses and cultivator around from one row to another, to take the cream to the station and to feed the pigs; that's all you can expect of a hired man."

"But ne can't get it through his skull that what I say amounts to anything. He will walk a mile out of his way to do what I have told him not to do," complained Merry Andrew.

This state of affairs reached its climax one night after choir practice. The Drew girls and Mr. Pudney had parted with Gene and Wully McNab at the south road corner, and were making their way leisurely towards home. Choir practice had been shorter than usual, it being one of the occasions when Mr. Pudney was contrary and would not stay to give the anthem the work it needed. Of late this constitutional contrariness had grown on Pudney.

"And who can wonder?" declared Merry Andrew, "knowing what the poor man is married to, and what his children are." Mother had suggested that a kind Providence blinded the eyes of parents to the defects of their own children, and married folk to the shortcomings of their partners.

"Doesn't work on Mrs. Pudney that way," retorted Merry Andrew; "she is always finding fault with Mr. Pudney."

Whatever it was on Mr. Pudney's mind this particular Saturday night it did not incite to sociability, and the Drews felt a certain relief when the McNabs left them at the corner. Three several and distinct times pleasant relations had been on the point of being broken owing to Wully McNab's joyous hilarity and Pudney's moroseness. The tact and soothing influence of the girls alone avoided the trouble. Once Merry Andrew had drawn Wully apart and warned him to curb his spirits.

"You may be married yourself some day," she suggested.

"I expect to be," owned Wully; "I have the lady picked out already."

"Poor thing!" sighed Merry Andrew, "does she know it? But I presume not. It doesn't matter how she feels about it. Girls have to take what is thrown to them nowadays or be old maids. But really, Wully, I do wish you would be a little more discreet where Mr. Pudney is concerned. Say your funny things to me or to Sylvia, but let him alone. You can see with half an eye that he is in no mood to-night to be badgered."

"I haven't badgered him."

"Well, he thought you were badgering him when

you suggested adding a rudder and a plane to his buggy and bringing it up to date as a means of locomotion."

"That was a joke," sighed Wully.

"But an awful poor one when cracked by a man who owns an automobile at one who owns a poor old buggy and no team fit to draw it."

"That did come into my mind the minute after I had said it, and I changed the subject at once —"

"Yes, asked him how Earl was getting along!"

"Well, what was the matter with that?"

"Why, Earl ran away from home last week!"

"Good gracious! I hadn't heard of it. But I can't seem to please Pudney nor you either the best way I can fix it."

"Why, Wully, you always please me. Ever since you made that wooden pig I have just thought everything of you —"

"Oh, darn! Here we are at the corner," groaned Wully, as Gene fell back and took her brother's arm at the parting of the ways. "Have a heart, Gene; must we head for home? You have no idea what corking things Andy was just getting round to say to me!" He bent and whispered in Merry Andrew's ear. "Do you suppose it would be safe for me to say 'Good night, Mr. Pudney.' Eh? — just that way — soft and repentant like?"

"Better cut it out," giggled Merry Andrew as Gene

dragged her irrepressible brother off down the road to the south.

Pudney and the two girls trudged on in silence for awhile. The windows of the stone house, and farther down the road still, those at Pudney's, blushed faintly with the afterglow. A gentle peace brooded over the fields, the long-stretched road, the widely scattered homesteads. A far-off sound broke the stillness — a terrible sound. First the staccato pounding of horses' feet on the hard roadbed; the clatter of flying wheels accentuated and focused by a girl's high, penetrating shriek of fear. Something took shape in the dusk ahead, something looming and swaying and fearsome.

"It's our buggy, by snakes!" yelled Pudney, at the same time making a frantic and futile effort to get over the fence to safety.

Merry Andrew's very soul crinkled with horror.

"Oh, Sylvia!" she gasped, her tongue dry and clinging to the roof of her mouth. "The colts!" Sylvia uttered a cry.

"Oh, get over the fence, Merry Andrew! Get over the fence!"

"No, no! The colts will try to turn in at our gate! They'll try — they'll try — Oh, my poor Nell! Oh, poor Charley!"

Again the agonized squeal of despair from the girling the swaying vehicle. Then the crash came.

As Merry Andrew had predicted, the colts, blind with terror, or liberty, or whatever it is which makes horses fling themselves on to death, recognized the home gate and attempted to make the turn a fence-length too soon. Down they went in the cruel wire, a crumpled, crippled, tumbling heap. The splintering of spoke and tongue and buggy-body was like the discharge of firearms; the terrified squeals of the lone passenger like the cries of the wounded on the battle field. But for these latter Merry Andrew had no care. They roused in her only a fierce rage as she ran gasping toward the wreck. She gathered strength and poise as she flew. She set her teeth and prepared for the worst; prepared to see her darling colts — one or both — tortured, torn, broken beyond all help save the merciful assistance of Grandfather's rifle — it was there, in the "doctor-house," together with gauze bandages, absorbent cotton, iron, laudanum, mustard, tar, turpentine, trocar, and yarn. She had left Sylvia and Pudney far in the rear, and without stopping to survey the disaster, she plunged straight for her first-aid and home.

Before Sylvia reached the gate she heard Merry Andrew's voice, high, clear, soothing her tortured animals, she heard the clip of wire cutters, and she saw the dark head in fearful proximity to struggling hoofs.

"Get a rope!" called Merry Andrew desperately, "Two ropes — oh, hurry!" Sylvia tottered to do her

bidding. Her feet seemed to stick to the road. Grandfather, Grandmother and Mother came running from the house, Mother crying out that Merry Andrew would be killed.

The colts were already somewhat quieted by the sound of their mistress's voice, soothing, reassuring them. The belated Pudney had ignored the Drew part of the tragedy to ascertain the extent of his own. He had raised his daughter from the ground and was shaking her soundly, apparently under the delusion that, if injured, she would drop apart.

With the ropes which Sylvia dragged to her, Merry Andrew tied the beating hoofs of the colts as best she could. By the light of the lantern which Mother had brought, Merry Andrew ruthlessly slashed the new harness wherever necessary to allow the colts to regain their legs, if legs they still possessed intact.

"Go into the house, Grandfather!" she called out suddenly. "Take him and go in!" this to Grandmother who was praying tremblingly.

Dorothy Pudney's wails still rent the air. Mrs. Pudney and Evangeline were running from the Pudney gate. Merry Andrew felt hot blood gushing over her hands and dyeing her skirt.

"The — rifle! Sylvia — Mother — bring the rifle!" she gasped. With a plunge Nelly gained her feet, followed immediately by her mate.

"Whoa, dears! Whoa, Charley!" soothed Merry

Andrew tremblingly. "Step out, old boy; step out a little —"

Charley "stepped out," shaking like the poor driven leaf that he was. Merry Andrew gave a little crow of ecstasy.

"He's hurt, Mother — he's cut pretty badly — but his bones are all right! They're all right, aren't they, old darling! Old darling boy! Whoa, boy! Whoa, Charley. Now — well — Grandfather, if you won't mind me and go into the house as I told you to, take Nell and lead her away. She seems to be all right; it's Charley who is winged. Dare you hold him, Mother? Here, at this side. He won't run away any more — poor trembling old goose! Now — that's right! I must run! He is bleeding awfully!"

She was back from her doctor-house in a moment with a bottle of tincture of iron to stop the flow of blood. Poor Charley shrank from the remedy and snorted suspiciously, but Pudney, having by this time ascertained that, beyond a badly cut face and a wrenched elbow, Dorothy was unhurt, now came to assist with the colt. Merry Andrew adjusted the bandages herself, Grandfather holding the lantern. The dark had come in earnest now, and the lantern light cast hobgoblin shadows of man and beast along the road.

"Mr. Pudney, will you run to Brown's and telephone for a veterinary to come right out? Right

away, mind! Tell him not to wait until morning; it is an urgent case — or — wait, here comes a team. Perhaps I can send by them.”

A buggy stopped and a welcome voice called out, “Hello, folks; what’s the matter?” Both Drew girls cried out in thankfulness, “Oh, it’s Bob Clyde!”

Bob had driven over to Cooperstown on banking business, and had come home by way of the Rosedale church thinking to “overtake some of the choir” on his way.

He stopped only for a quickly-told story of the accident, then set out for Bendon and the veterinary surgeon.

“Ask Mr. Pudney if he would like to send for the doctor for Dorothy,” suggested Mother.

“I won’t!” snapped Merry Andrew. “What’s the use of putting it into the poor man’s head; then he’d be obliged to do it just for the look of things. She walked home, and she never could have screeched like that if there had been anything very serious the matter with her. I never want to see her again! I can’t bear the thought of her —”

“Oh, my dear! My dear,” whispered Mother, “it is when the battle is on that a soldier must show his mettle — not on dress parade!”

“I’ll be up tomorrow!” Bob Clyde called back, as he urged his horse into a lively gait and disappeared in the gloom,

Grandmother, who had gone with the Pudneys to help dress Dorothy's wounds, returned. Pudney, she told them, had gone to look after that unfortunate young man who had either jumped or been thrown out somewhere between Bendon and the eastern edge of Brown's marsh.

"Think of it!" stormed Merry Andrew, "that poor Pudney, so tired he could hardly drag home from choir practice, to have to go traveling off three miles to pick up that — that —"

"Look out — look out, dear; Charley is half inclined to think you are scolding at him — Whoa, Charley, old fellow!"

They drove Grandfather and Grandmother off to bed, and, later, Mother; but the girls waited with Charley for the veterinary to come.

The surgeon was loud in praise of Merry Andrew's prompt treatment. She had, he assured her, saved the beast. Charley would not be fit for work for awhile, but he would come out as right as a trivet. It had been a close squeak, all right. No, he had seen nothing of the missing Phil Starr on his way out; and he certainly would have seen him if he had been lying very close to the road or on the car track. They need not worry; he had either been picked up, or had made his way back to Bendon by himself. Young Clyde had warned the surgeon to keep an eye out for Starr as he himself had done while driving into town,

"You'll never see the chap again," he added.

"We'll see him again," growled Merry Andrew.
"He has nearly another month's wages due."

An hour later, when the lantern had ceased to bob about the Drew barn, and the others had gone to rest, Merry Andrew and Sylvia stood awhile on the back doorstep while Merry Andrew braided her damp hair. Her battle-stained clothes were in the shed-room and she was sweet once more in a worn but clean old dressing jacket of Sylvia's. The jacket was blue, tangled over with fady roses, and Sylvia laughingly presented her palm to have her fortune told.

"With your hair down, and in that rig, you look like the veriest, wildest, wickedest gipsy of the roads —" she paused, startled at Merry Andrew's action, who dropped her hair and clutched Sylvia's arm with a grip that hurt, crushing her close against the clapboards of the house.

"Listen!" she whispered. Sylvia listened but heard nothing. But she saw distinctly a dark figure moving towards the barn. Merry Andrew saw it also, and noiselessly opened the house door to disappear within.

She returned with Grandfather's rifle. She was worse than a wicked gipsy now; she was Medea, the embodied spirit of vengeance.

"Stay here!" she commanded, and ran lightly toward the barn, her rifle at present, like an attacking

soldier fresh from a trench. Sylvia trembled, but followed. She was defenseless, and so frightened that her feet would scarcely obey the mandates of her will; but not for a moment did her heart falter in its loyalty to that furious little sister running there so vindictively with her death-dealing weapon. Of the two she was the braver, for Merry Andrew, under the impulse of anger, the primitive passion of battle, bounded forward in a fierce sort of pleasure. Sylvia alone knew the terror, the awful sinking of the spirit, which might come upon Merry Andrew also after some fearful and irrevocable event. Merry Andrew had said rightly that her repentance came always after the sin had been committed.

Merry Andrew moved swiftly, and before the fear-weighted feet of Sylvia overtook her she had disappeared around the east end of the barn and reached the south side. As Sylvia rounded the southeast corner she saw a picture which she will never forget.

A tongue of flame spiraled from a mound of straw piled against the barn. Its light illumined the features of Philip Starr who had turned at the instant to gaze into the barrel of Grandfather's rifle, held in the hands of a veritable young fury.

"Stamp it out, *or I will kill you!* Stamp — and stamp fast!"

Philip began to stamp.

"More! Scatter the straw!" Philip dragged the straw from the barn.

"Now put up your hands and march for the house!" Merry Andrew advanced upon him. He threw up his hands and began to retreat, still facing her. She called to Sylvia to run and open the back door and light a lamp.

"Oh, Merry Andrew, and leave you alone with — him?" remonstrated Sylvia.

"Don't you worry about *him*! If he gives me the chance I'll be glad to shoot — to kill! I'll be glad to! I'll be glad to!"

Starr was now thoroughly alive to his peril.

"You wouldn't shoot a man — to kill, would you?" he whimpered.

"I'd be glad to! I'd be glad to!" Merry Andrew repeated, and Sylvia's horror mounted. Merry Andrew was surely mad, or she could not say those words over and over in that fiendish manner. Sylvia ran past the two, captor and captive, in the direction of the house.

"Step to the left!" commanded Merry Andrew and the hope of escape died in Starr's bosom. With Sylvia straight behind him, Merry Andrew would not have dared put her threat of shooting into execution. But the girl behind the gun had recognized the thought in its inception.

"I'd be glad to!" she repeated with the same terrible intonation, and Philip Starr realized that the words were true. He wilted visibly. His really fine form seemed to shrivel into weakness as he backed cautiously before that steady muzzle. Lights flashed up over both floors of the house. The back door flew open and Grandfather, in his trousers and bare feet, came running out followed by the rest of the family.

"Don't get in range," called Merry Andrew, "because if he doesn't do as I tell him to I'm going to kill him! I'd be glad to! Now turn around, march into the kitchen and sit down!" she commanded. Philip obeyed. He marched hurriedly up the walk, through the open door and dropped into the chair indicated. "For once you are doing as I tell you, I notice. Now, Grandfather, will you tie him — tie his hands? If you don't, and he tries to break and run, I shall kill him!"

"I ain't goin' to run," muttered Starr sullenly. Now, in the lamplight, he was an object to excite pity in any save a wholly ruthless mind. In his leap from the Pudney buggy he had received a cut across the temple from which the blood had run and dried upon his cheek. There were smirches of smoke there, also, acquired while stamping out the fire he had built; and in his eyes the cringing fear of the coward as he glared at Merry Andrew with her rifle. But with all, his face was pleasant to look upon compared with the face of

his captor. Sylvia remembered that she had once dreaded to see Merry Andrew look like Grandmother. Now she saw in that savage, beautiful face an expression of which Grandmother's would have been incapable. Once Boy, in a puppyish and wholly innocent curiosity, had faced a half-grown gray kitten. In place of running for life, as Boy obviously believed it her nature to do, the cat had crouched, her eyes yellow with battle, her tail lashing in an inherited fury, then sprang and fastened herself on Boy's shoulder in a life and death grip. Whereupon Boy had done the running act himself.

When Sylvia looked at Merry Andrew she thought of Pierce's wicked little gray cat.

As Grandfather obeyed Merry Andrew's commands to the letter Grandmother employed the time by demanding to know what everything was all about. Mother merely shook with a veritable agony of fear; not of the vindictive hired man, but of the demon of hate looking out of the eyes of her girl.

At last, there sat Philip Starr with a trunk-strap hugging his wrists until his hands were swollen and purple; and there stood Merry Andrew in her flowered gown, her black hair in a cloud about her anger-smitten face; a face unbearably, cruelly beautiful.

"Now!" she said, and set her weapon carefully against the wall behind her. "Now we will listen to what you have to say for yourself!"

At once Starr went all of a mush of self-pity. He began to make excuses for taking the colts against "the boss's" orders. Merry Andrew cut him short.

"You can't excuse yourself there! Go on — tell about the runaway, and why you were going to burn my —" She paused and pressed her two brown hands against her throat as if to stifle that horrible spirit which arose within her at the thought of what he had really tried to bring about. He, however, did not see her struggle. He was wallowing on, growing almost tearfully sentimental at the state of his own feelings, winding up at last with a slobbery prayer for mercy — he dreaded state prison!

"Are you quite through?" demanded his captor. He nodded.

"I will tell you, then, what we will do: You have confessed before witnesses that you intended to burn our barn in order to be revenged on the poor colts for running away with you and smashing you up. It is in our power to send you to jail any time we see fit. But if you will walk out of this house, and out of this yard, and down the road to Bendon, take the first train out and never show your face in this part of the country again, we will let you go. Is that all right, Grandfather?" Grandfather nodded.

"Ain't you goin' to give me what wages is comin' to me?" demanded the prisoner.

"No. They will be needed in part payment of the veterinary's bill."

"Then I can't take a train out of Bendon. I ain't got the price of a ticket."

Merry Andrew went into the best bedroom and brought out five dollars.

"That will take you to Chicago; and you won't need a return."

Grandfather untied the prisoner and he walked forth, Merry Andrew, rifle in hand, keeping him in view until he disappeared on the dusky road to Bendon.

Presently she came in again and set the rifle behind the door. Her face was white and empty-looking, like a lamp when the flame has been blown out. A silence brooded over the family. Usually, after some happening, grave or gay, they talked it over, but tonight there seemed nothing to do or to say.

"He may come back," whispered Sylvia at last.

"He will not come back," returned Merry Andrew, "but I shall stay in the barn tonight, just the same. I want to look Charley over again anyhow —"

"You shall do nothing of the sort —" began Grandfather, but Mother interposed.

"Yes, let her go, Grandfather; it will do her good."

"Then I shall stay with you," said Sylvia.

"No, I would rather stay alone. Leave your window open, and if I should need help I'll fire the rifle."

Then she took her gun and the lantern and bade them good night.

“Don’t you see,” sighed Mother, “she’s just driven! She must go somewhere alone to be rid of that white heat of anger. I pray that out there among the poor creatures she has saved from a fiery death she may find herself again — her own good, sweet self.”

CHAPTER XIX

It was a week, however, before Merry Andrew "found herself." For days she went about saggingly, unhappily, with an age-old expression on her face which had never been there before. She ate so little that even Grandfather was alarmed.

"Just as I prophesied," breathed Grandmother, "a child cannot do a man's work. A little girl cannot run a business which would tax a man. She's breaking under it! And all this expense incurred — men coming tomorrow to begin building the silo — and Grandfather obliged to take the brunt of things again, as of course I knew he would, and he not able, and never will be able to run the place again — oh, when will young folks learn to profit by the wisdom of age!"

As usual, neither Mother nor Sylvia replied. Grandmother knew they would not. But she recognized the trouble in her daughter-in-law's face. She threw out another feeler to touch, if possible, the sensitive spot in the younger woman's heart:

"It's going to be a terrible day! Bad enough for men to have to work in the fields under such a sun!"

"But she has worked many a day like this before," expostulated Mother.

"She used to be so hearty, though," said Sylvia, "but now, for a week she has been a sick girl; anyone can see that."

"She hasn't been herself since the runaway," said Grandmother. "The feminine frame is not fitted to cope with the rough happenings of a farm."

"I don't think it was the runaway," ventured Mother timidly; "it was what happened afterward which is troubling Merry Andrew."

"She was awfully stirred up," owned Sylvia.

"If the child had been controlled in her early years she might have been able to control herself in later days," said Grandmother.

"Perhaps that is true," agreed Mother sorrowfully.

"I don't see what else she could have done," objected Sylvia stoutly. "She saved our barn and our stock."

"Like a Western outlaw; by the quick handling of a gun!" groaned Grandmother.

"None of the rest of us could have done it," retorted Sylvia, "and although I was literally paralyzed with horror at the time I realize now that nothing but a gun would have answered the need. If you could have seen the vindictiveness in that big brute's face — it was horrible. He was absolutely reckless."

"He will burn the barn yet," said Grandmother hollowly.

"I think it is that fear which is working on Merry

Andrew," said Sylvia. "Instead of rolling into bed and falling asleep at once and lying like a little stone image until I pull her out in the morning, as she always has, she rolls and groans, and creeps out of bed almost every hour to stare out over the yard."

"You see — she is breaking!" Grandmother uttered the last word as if it had been "dying."

All three women went about their separate and individual tasks a little more worried than before they had talked over their anxieties. Interviews with Grandmother were apt to end this way. She was one of those who exhale discouragement naturally. Perhaps this was the reason of her being excluded from so many family conferences. Perhaps this accounted for Grandfather's habitual attitude of hopelessness toward the battles of life. By nature he was of a cheerful turn of mind — given to jokes and sly chucklings.

There was extra work in the kitchen that day; bread and pies and cake to be made for the silo builders. Mother and Grandmother worked mostly in silence, Mother wiping the perspiration from her pale little face, Grandmother stepping every half hour to the front of the house, where the thermometer hung on the oak tree in the shade, and always returning more hopeless than before her investigation. She would announce the rising mercury and a sense of added heat would roll over the other inmates of the kitchen with

an almost unbearable pressure. Merry Andrew, driving the old team, was going through the corn for the last time. Grandfather was weakly pottering about the barn trying to round things up and lighten the night chores as much as possible. It was "church day" and Sylvia must clean the lamps, sweep, and dust the pews. In the afternoon she had many music lessons to give. The dogs had started valiantly in the morning to do their feckless duty — follow the team up and down between the wilting corn rows, but their mistress had ordered them home, and now they lay in the shade of the barn, snapping flies, or taking lifeless journeys to the horse-trough for water.

"Some of us ought to go over to Pudney's and inquire about Dorothy," said Mother. "We haven't seen a sight of her, nor of any of the family since the — accident."

Mother had spoken prematurely. At that moment Evangeline drifted around the corner of the house and came to anchor at the pump.

"Why, here is Evangeline now," said Mother. "How do you do, Evangeline? Come in."

"Um-umm!" grunted Evangeline, and swung on the pump-handle.

"Wouldn't you like a couple of cookies?" Mother extended them, warm and brown and luscious. Evangeline advanced coyly and possessed herself of the

bait as a stray dog accepts a bone, expecting poison, but too hungry to avoid the risk.

"You had better come in out of the sun," suggested Mother. "Not in here; it is very warm in this kitchen, but it is nice and cool in the living-room. Go in there and sit down and eat your cookies."

"Um-umm," repeated Evangeline, "I can't. Ma don't want me to come to your house any more. We're mad at your folks."

With great difficulty Mother kept a twinkling smile from the corners of her mouth. Grandmother, on her half-hourly trip to the thermometer, was lingering a pleasant moment in the northerly shade.

"Why, is that so? I'm sorry," said Mother. "Have another cookie." Evangeline accepted two with reluctance. Her fingers were very dirty.

"What are your folks mad at us for?" Evangeline wriggled and grinned and stuffed a cookie into her mouth.

"Who is it that is mad?"

"Ma 'n' Dorothy."

"What about?"

"Merry Andrew is so mean!"

"Is she? Well, if Merry Andrew has been mean her mother ought to be told; don't you think so, Evangeline? She ought to be punished, and her mother is the one to do it. Don't you remember that time you

came over and broke all the eggs under the old turkey hen who was almost ready to hatch them? I didn't punish you, Merry Andrew didn't punish you, but we told your mother what you had done, and that we thought you ought to be punished, and I presume, as she was the proper person to do it, I presume she did punish you."

Evangeline grinned sheepishly and mined a caraway seed from a cookie with a slate-colored finger.

"She didn't, though."

"Didn't? Well. Then, after all, you were never punished."

"Yes I was, too."

"By whom?"

"Merry Andrew."

"Why, Evangeline, I never heard of that."

"She kitched me in the barn and —"

"Well?"

"— made me eat one of them turkey aiggs — Waugh! I can taste 'er yet!" Evangeline laid the small remnant of a cookie on the top of the pump and left it there. Mother was shocked and showed it.

"Why didn't you tell me, Evangeline?"

"I didn't dast. Merry Andrew said if I told anybody she'd make me eat another. She saved one an' laid it on the beam in the barn."

Grandmother came back from the oak to announce thermometer returns.

"There must certainly be a storm before night. It can't go on this way! How do you do, Evangeline? How is Dorothy?"

"She's got a cut in the face."

"I know — of course. How is her face getting along?"

"I d'know. Pa says serves 'er right; maw says she won't hear such talk."

"But what are you folks mad at us for?" questioned Mother as Grandmother turned away to seek cooler quarters. Evangeline fell into another twisting, grinning silence of such provoking duration that Mother was about to go back to her baking without the explanation when it was vouchsafed:

"Merry Andrew wanted Dorothy's beau, and when he wouldn't have Merry Andrew she wouldn't let him work here no more."

Mother was taken so completely by surprise that she said nothing, and Evangeline announced that she was "awful hot" and must go home — and went.

When Sylvia came from her janitor work at the church Mother told her of Evangeline's disclosure.

"Which goes to show," said Sylvia, "that Mr. Philip Starr is still in the neighborhood, or how should Dorothy know that Merry Andrew had discharged him? None of them has been over, at least not near enough to find out about Philip's leaving. I saw poor

old Pudney gathering up the sad remains of the buggy out of the road the day after the runaway."

They debated the advisability of telling or not telling Merry Andrew the new complication with the Pudneys, but decided at last to await developments.

At four o'clock thunder clouds began piling up in the west, but the storm did not break until after the Drews were all in bed. Then it swept in fury across the land. The oak at the north side of the house hissed and groaned in the blast. Mother, with her red head completely enveloped in the bed coverings to shut out the lightning and the sharp cracks of thunder and the awe-inspiring assaults of the wind, thrilled with fear at the realization of a presence in the room. She sat up in bed and demanded sharply, "Sylvia, is that you? Are you afraid, too?"

"It isn't Sylvia, Mother."

"Why, Merry Andrew, dear; come right here and climb into bed with mother! You never used to waken in thunder storms."

But Merry Andrew threw herself on the floor beside her mother's bed, moaning and sobbing in utter abandonment. Mother, stilled and steadied by this greater storm in a human heart, was down beside her in a moment, soothing, caressing, and begging her to tell her own mother the trouble.

"You know, Mother; you know very well! I am a terrible girl! If you were not my mother you would

hate me! You know — and God knows, that at heart I am — a murderess! Think of it, Mother — a murderess! I wanted a chance to kill him, I hated him so! When I thought of my poor patient cows, and the old mares, and Nell and Charley — whom he had already nearly killed — writhing and burning — and me all powerless, just standing to watch their agonies — and he sneaking leering away, everything that is bad in me leaped and stung and took possession of me — I fairly ached with wickedness —”

“Merry Andrew,” breathed Mother solemnly, “let us pray!”

Outside, the wind tore at the old stone house like mad; the lightning seemed fairly snapping through the rooms searching for somebody — somebody who was beyond pardon; at every cracking thunderbolt the house shivered. But through it all Mother’s voice was audible praying for her little girl, thanking the good Lord that the spirit of hatred which had for a time actuated the child at her side had not, after all, brought about a tragedy. Hate, at this present time, seemed to be permeating the world; it was leaving great heaps of dead upon the harvest fields of Europe; it had crept into the heart of a young girl out here among the quiet spaces of Rosedale, and had led her toward the red road of murder; it had put the desire to kill into her heart. But only for a little hour. She had been saved. She had been spared the doing of an awful deed, and now,

realizing her peril, knelt humbly before her God praying to be forgiven and strengthened in the future against recurring temptations.

Doors opened and shut in the stone house. Grandmother, carrying a lamp, came to Mother's room and saw two white figures kneeling side by side.

"Amen!" finished Mother, and, "Amen!" echoed Merry Andrew, and they rose together.

"It's a fearful storm!" quavered Grandmother.

"Yes," answered Mother, looking tenderly at Merry Andrew, "it was a fearful storm, but — I'm thinking it is over, and I am hoping that we shall never have another like it."

As long as she lives Merry Andrew will remember that night as one of the sharp angles in her life; one of the stations where she faced another direction. She might in the future feel the same white heat of passion, but never again should it control her and drive her to frenzy as it had in the past. For she would think of Mother kneeling there amid the crashing storm, forgetting her own fear in her appeal for help for her girl; that little white, night-gowned figure with its red hair about its shoulders, would stand like an angel with a flaming sword between Merry Andrew and her temptations; that prayer would come to her always — that prayer! Why, that was the first prayer she had ever really heard! When the ministers prayed her thoughts were always straying to her work, her jokes, her every-

day life; but that prayer of Mother's had been vital — had been real. Mother was not praying "Lord, Lord," in a perfunctory manner; Mother had prayed for something she wanted more than anything else on earth, and if Merry Andrew had any will-power, any shadow of self-control left, that prayer should be answered royally and perceptibly, please God, so that Mother could know that it was answered.

The storm, as is the way with Mid-West storms, disappeared entirely before the first robin piped in the apple-trees. The morning came gloriously and shone upon a world somewhat beaten, but refreshed, cooled and made comfortable once more. And the wind in the night seemed to have carried away the vapors from the entire Drew family. Even the dogs felt the change. They cavorted about, panting and grinning and playing canine jokes on Grandfather and Merry Andrew on the way to the morning milking. The silo men were coming, and the call to work was insistent on every hand.

Merry Andrew was glad. She felt like a life prisoner who had been given another chance. Work? Who dreaded work! It was great; it was glorious — when one had been reprieved.

There were the regular chores to be done, the feeding, the milking, the putting to pasture and the shutting up; the work in the cream room, the going to market, the gentle exercising of Charley on his injured

leg, the starting of the silo men, and, afterwards, the long day afield. It was glorious — when one had been reprieved; given another chance to be a human being instead of — a killer!

“I believe I’ll stop at Pudney’s when I get back from taking the cream,” said Merry Andrew, “and see if I can’t get him to help us for a day or so until I can find a man —”

“Oh, no; I wouldn’t!” expostulated Sylvia and Mother in one breath.

“Why not?” Merry Andrew’s curiosity was aroused by the earnestness of their objections. Then Mother told the reason, and Merry Andrew laughed until she wept. It was very funny.

“Here I’ve been hating him so that — that — and here Dorothy thinks that — oh, me oh my, but this is awful funny! I’m going over just the same. I’m going to tell Dorothy and her father and her mother the reason I fired that man. They ought to know the truth. She might get mixed up with him in some way.”

“I’ll go with you,” offered Mother, and they went across the road together.

Pudney was eating his breakfast alone. In answer to the rap on the kitchen door he called out, “Come in,” and was so startled when he saw who his visitors were that he jumped up, overturning the chair in which he had been sitting.

Merry Andrew waded into her errand at once.

"I came over to see if you could help us a few days, Mr. Pudney." Pudney snarled like a dog:

"No, I can't! I don't intend ever to set foot on your place again, and I don't know as I care to have you foolin' round my place!"

"What's the matter, Mr. Pudney?"

"You know well enough what's the matter!"

"No, I don't," declared Merry Andrew stoutly.

"Go an' look at my buggy and see if you can't remember!"

"I don't see what your buggy has to do with the matter. If it comes to that, what's the matter with your coming and looking at our colts. They're pretty badly banged up, and worse than that, they will never get over the effects of this runaway to their dying day; you know that, Mr. Pudney, as well as I do. When a colt once runs away there is an untrustworthy horse to pay for it."

"And whose fault is it?" yelled Mr. Pudney. "It's your'n! Your'n!" he accused, wagging a rusty forefinger very close to Merry Andrew's shapely little nose.

"Oh, no, Mr. Pudney," interposed Mother, speaking for the first time, "Merry Andrew had nothing to do with the runaway."

"Didn't you tell Phil Starr to snuck over here, hitch onto THE BUGGY" (Mr. Pudney alluded to the departed vehicle in capital letters) "and wait around till

I'd git in from choir practice, and then pick you and your sister up and go off fur a ride?"

"Mr. Pudney,"—Merry Andrew was almost unnaturally calm—"your good commonsense ought to tell you that such a story—I don't care where you got it—is altogether untrue. You know well enough that I never allowed Philip Starr to draw a line over the backs of our colts. There have been a good many mornings when I should have been glad to have him use the colts to take the cream to town, but I never let him drive them."

There was the sound of feet—six of them—coming down stairs. Pudney strode forward and threw open the stair door and called: "Dorothy, you bring that there letter of Starr's down with yeh."

"If it's fur any of them Drews, I won't do ut!" returned his filial daughter, and presently appeared, followed by her mother and Evangeline. Mrs. Pudney did not spar for an opening, but began the fracas at once.

"I should think you folks 'ud be ashamed of yourselves ever to show up over here after what you've handed us! An' after all our kind an' neighborly feelin's towards you, too. An' lendin' an' borrowin' an' all! An' Pudney gittin' you a man—it's fierce, that's just all there is to ut!"

"Fierce!" echoed Dorothy.

There had been times when Dorothy had appeared

to better advantage. Having one eye closed and swollen, one cheek crossed with a band of adhesive plaster and an arm in a sling did not add to her attractiveness.

"Just look at that poor child!" invited Mrs. Pudney. Not so long ago Merry Andrew would have looked, and laughed. Her own recent advance in the humanities forbade that; she looked, and was compassionate.

"I am truly sorry," she said, and meant it. "But I say again, I am not at all to blame, and Dorothy knows it."

"You broke our buggy, an' you fired Dorothy's beau —" began Evangeline, but stopped suddenly to attend to a serious concussion of the ear. She had miscalculated the distance between herself and her mother and had suffered in consequence. Mrs. Pudney returned to business:

"No neighborhood can git along with a person like you in it, Merry Andrew! You jest want to run everything; and when you can't, you kick over the traces! Pudney's allers a jawin' about the McNabs and the Pierces, but says I, 'You want to know where all the trouble starts? It's with the Drews that you think is so all-fired nice' Says I, 'You can run around and wait on 'em — sing in their old choir after they've just actually insulted your wife and daughter,' says I, 'just because your daughter takes with the boys and is prettier than they are!'"

Mother began to wither under these accusations. She also began to fear for the strain of this interview on Merry Andrew's new resolutions as that young person interrupted Mrs. Pudney's résumé of family arguments.

"Of course she is prettier than we are — we know that, Mrs. Pudney, and have always acknowledged it. But now come to the point. About this runaway: You think I was to blame, and I think Philip Starr was to blame. He stole my colts, and your buggy and your pretty daughter, and went off for a ride. He is not a good hand with horses; you know that, Dorothy, and he let them get away. He nearly ruined the colts, quite ruined your buggy, and got both himself and Dorothy badly smashed up. After all, I have suffered more than anyone else —"

"It was an underhanded, jealous trick to fire Phil, though," blurted Dorothy, "just because he didn't want to go with you, and did want to go with me."

It is almost impossible for one not subjected to the temptation to know how hard it is to look squarely into the face of an accuser who is all awry from a swollen cheek and a closed eye, and not to smile. Merry Andrew may have felt the inclination, but she did not yield to it. Possibly the seriousness of the open confession she was about to make had some restraining influence.

"You are away off, Dorothy," she asserted almost

sadly. "I didn't like Philip Starr any better than he liked me, which was not at all. I fired him, not because he disobeyed me and took my colts out of the barn without my knowledge, which was bad enough — and I think I should have fired him for that later — but he didn't wait to be discharged, he quit. But before he left he sneaked back and to be revenged on the poor dumb colts who had smashed him up, set fire to our barn. Sylvia and I caught him in the act. No, it isn't love for Phil Starr which has pretty nearly killed me; it is hate for him! I had Grandfather's rifle, and — well — Phil Starr pretty nearly made a murderess out of me!"

"By snakes!" ejaculated Pudney, "is that straight, Mis' Drew?"

Mother nodded gravely.

"Yes, it is so — pretty nearly made her kill him; but, thank God, not quite."

"Set fire to your barn — you caught him — had your grandfather's rifle and didn't let her go? I'd a shot him at the drop of the hat! I would, by snakes!"

"I don't believe a word of it!" snapped Dorothy. But her father's grimy forefinger was now pointed at her long-suffering nose:

"Don't ever let me hear of that there feller hangin' round, or by turnips, he'll find out there's more fire-arms than what belongs to the Drews in this neighborhood; you hear me? Nor you nuther, you old

dummy!" This term of endearment he bestowed upon his wife.

"Isn't it queer," reflected Merry Andrew as she and her mother were on their way home, "that a man can court a person and tell 'em how he loves 'em, and still sees the day when he can call that selfsame person a 'dummy'! I'm glad I'm never going to marry."

A little sensitive flutter showed at the corners of Mother's mouth; a faraway look came into her eyes — her 'over-the-river look,' Merry Andrew had once called it.

"It is a pity," she owned. "Yet still, that man loves that woman; I know he does. Poor old Pudney!"

"Perhaps," admitted Merry Andrew, "but, do you know, these domestic love-scenes where the husband calls the wife 'a dummy,' and the wife fondly hits him over the head with a skillet, don't seem, somehow, to appeal to my sense of the romantic!" They laughed together, and Merry Andrew ran away to attend to her silo-builders, while Mother went in to her kitchen work well content that Merry Andrew had got back to joking in the old familiar way.

CHAPTER XX

Merry Andrew was going through the silage corn in the orchard. The weather, having behaved itself for over a week, was once more working back to a state of unbearable heat, to be followed, undoubtedly, by another almost unbearable thunderstorm in the way of midsummer weather. For the first time, Charley was again taking his regular portion of toil. He favored the injured leg a good deal and Merry Andrew allowed him protracted rests at both ends of the rows. It had been a queer week; full of excitements and happenings of all kinds. Gene McNab's fiancé had come on from New York very unexpectedly, and the McNab young people had taken him up to one of the northern lakes on a fishing trip, with Mrs. McNab as a most reluctant chaperone.

Merry Andrew reflected, as she rode along to the pleasant purr of loosening soil, that without either the Pudneys or the McNabs, and with a crowd of strange workmen in the living-room every evening, it had been, to say the least, a strange week. In consequence of the absence of the McNabs from the choir she considered that the music had been almost a failure. She and Sylvia had made a whispered arrangement for a duet

when she had glimpsed Pudney's battered old felt hat at the church door. They had welcomed him joyfully, having feared that the quarrel would keep him from the choir. But he had allowed himself to be persuaded into rendering a bass solo, and the flattering comments he received after service had sent him home much puffed up and pleased with everybody, himself included. Since Sunday Merry Andrew had not seen him nor any member of his family. She wondered what Wully would think of the silo. His father had seen, and approved it; had, in fact, been rather struck with its complete up-to-dateness in comparison with its cost. Merry Andrew congratulated herself that there were other surprises awaiting Wully McNab after his absence of nearly two weeks.

Boy and Twoboy paced solemnly behind the cultivator, or took short side excursions to investigate possible mole burrows. The air was heavy with the breath of clover. It was like heaven there in the orchard; so still, so fragrant, so altogether soothing. Over in the south lot the grays could be seen working steadily and soberly. When Merry Andrew remembered who was driving the grays — all steadily and soberly that way — she could hardly restrain her impatience to tell Wully McNab. Wully would be surprised, sure enough, when he heard the news. Yes, indeed, Wully and Gene would be somewhat surprised.

Now, when Merry Andrew thought of it, it had been

lonesome without Wully. No quips and quirks and fooleries! She had tried to imagine at times that she did not care for so much nonsense; but after all, nonsense — a certain amount on the side, so to speak — lightened the tiresome everyday march of labor.

“‘As we journey through life, let us live by the way,’” she quoted, and pulled Charley off the row of young corn which, he had evidently determined, should not have that advantage. Suddenly, actuated by a common impulse, the dogs shot forward with a bound, the colts pricked their ears, and there, in the edge of the orchard under the Petofskey apple tree, stood Wully McNab grinning at her.

He was all in white, and as he stood fanning himself with his hat, for the first time in his life he looked very handsome to Merry Andrew, very chic and gentlemanly and up-to-date.

With the usual inconsistency of feminine nature, Merry Andrew resented his white suit, his coolness, his air of the world. She had two minds to make him tramp along the length of the row with the dogs to the house end of the orchard before she stopped to “visit.” She might have done so if it had not been for the budget of news — some good, some bad — which she had to communicate. She was, also, gratified by the fact that Boy and Twoboy, in their frantic efforts to express their pleasure at his return and their general approval of him, had somewhat modified Wul-

ly's immaculateness. Boy had left generous samples of the orchard mold on the front of Wully's negligee shirt, and Twoboy, heedless of his recent mole investigations, nuzzled inanely over Wully's hands, thereby improving his own cleanliness at the expense of that of his friend. Wully did not mind.

"You look as if you were honestly glad to get back," said Merry Andrew, "geeing" the colts, and anchoring them for their regular period of rest. She descended from the cultivator and shook hands with Wully, still somewhat resenting his lazy freshness in such marked contrast with her own workaday unkempt condition. "Geewhillikins, but you are dressed up!"

"If you think I'm dressed up you ought to see Gene's man," chuckled Wully.

"I don't care to see him. You are plenty dressed up for me. Had a good time?"

"Bully. Awful storm, though."

"Wasn't that an awful storm!" Merry Andrew fell silent for a moment, remembering all that happened on the night of that storm.

"It's over, though," she sighed, lifting her face and drawing in a long breath of sunlight and perfume. "It's over, and everything is serene."

"Come on, Andy, and loaf a minute or two under the tree here."

"Mercy! Are you going to sit right down on the

grass in those clothes? Anyhow, push those dogs off. Come away from him, you pups! Can't you distinguish between a common laboring person and a dressed-up one who has been cawmping with a pawty from Ne' Yawk?"

"Quit fooling," demanded Wully, "and tell us the news."

"Haven't you heard?"

"Cross my heart — not a word. What's up? We just came home along the pike. I saw your grays over yonder in the south lot and I gave the wheel to Conway. I said 'I'm going over to see Andy.' Then I caught sight of your floppy hat here in the orchard and I jumped the fence and came here. Phil Starr all right again after the runaway, eh? Sobered down to work, I see."

"Not! No sir, not for our folks. But, as the books say, more of that anon."

"Don't anon the most important item of all; tell me about it. Did you ship Starr and get a new hand?"

"Exactly what I did."

"You were lucky."

"Wasn't I? The luckiest transaction that has come my way since I began farming on my own hook."

"He must be a peach. Tell me about him."

"But I want to keep that till the last."

"My goodness! It must be the Prince of Wales

you have working for you!" Wully got up and craned over at the figure driving the gray team in the south lot.

"Better than that," laughed Merry Andrew. "But never mind him now; I'm keeping him until the last. I want to tell you the really startling news."

"He must be a whirlwind," mused Wully, his mind still fastened on Merry Andrew's new hired man.

"You would have thought a whirlwind had been cultivating corn if you had seen the field that first day."

"No good at all, eh?" concluded Wully brightening.

"Well, I should think, good — the poor dear. Look at him over there. Plodding and skipping and jerking along with that old cultivator — it's horrid of me to use the new one and let him struggle along with the old. I understand how to handle it and could work it so much better." Wully did not dissemble his disdain.

"Yes, you are laying yourself open to censure from the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Hired Men. Who is he?"

Wully peered again. There was something familiar about the gait, now that he could see clearly.

"It isn't —"

"Yes, it is — Bob Clyde." Merry Andrew laughed happily. She looked at Wully, expecting to see her own triumph and delight mirrored in his expression.

She was disappointed. Wully slumped back upon the grass rather heavily.

"Well," she demanded, "why don't you say you are surprised? You act as if you had expected to come home and find me with a live banker cultivating corn in my south lot. Aren't you surprised?"

"Not very much."

"'Not very much'!" she mimicked. "My, but you're provoking, Wully! I suppose since you have been off with your high-toned company you have just everlastingly forgotten everything in the Rosedale neighborhood! I suppose that you think that I couldn't tell you a single thing that would surprise you or arouse your interest. And maybe I couldn't! Anyhow, perhaps I'd better not try. Go on and tell me what a good time you've had camping, and how many fish you caught. I won't be mean; I'll hold up my hands and believe every whopper that you are a mind to invent about size and number!" Wully was strangely silent.

"Well, I'm waiting."

"I didn't fish. Harold caught a minnow or two."

"Didn't fish! What did you do?"

"Carried water and dried the dishes — mother washed 'em — cut wood and built fires while Gene and Harold spooned."

"Oh. Well, they say all the world loves a lover."

"That's a mistake," said Wully. They fell silent

again. The wind sighed softly in the branches overhead. Twoboy snapped a predatory fly. Wully's eyes, in spite of himself, wandered to the plodding grays over in the south lot. An uncomfortable restraint settled upon the two under the apple boughs. Merry Andrew came to the conclusion that it was owing to an all-encompassing ennui which Wully felt at returning to her simple companionship. She was longing to draw his attention to the silo, but she would not. What were silos to a young man thinking of New York! She had intended to tell in detail of Dorothy Pudney's elopement and of Pudney's anger, and of Mrs. Pudney's connivance and the consequent breaking up of the Pudney family, leaving Pudney and Evangeline floating like two disconsolate chips on the scene of the wreck; how Mother and Grandmother and Sylvia were baking pies and bread and cookies to supply the Pudney larder in what Pudney insisted was but a temporary absence of his wife. All this had happened in the McNab neighborhood since Wully and his sister had been away; and Merry Andrew had gone over in her mind the telling of it to Wully and witnessing his surprise and hearing his funny or indignant comments. What a difference two weeks in the company of a prospective brother-in-law from New York could make in a body's interests! Wully did not seem to care what had happened since he left home. Well, she would not force the little insignificant home gossip

upon him ; let someone else tell him about the Pudneys !

“ What — excuse did he give ? ” asked Wully suddenly, as if coming back from some far distant place — New York, for instance.

“ Excuse did he give ? ” repeated Merry Andrew, “ Why, it wasn’t his fault at all ; it was altogether her fault — ” Then she remembered that although she had been thinking of the Pudneys, they had not been speaking of the Pudneys and that she must be on the wrong track.

“ Who are you talking about, Wully ? ” she asked innocently enough. He smiled at her sarcastically.

“ You try and think, Andy.”

“ Well, don’t be so awfully smart, Wully McNab ; my mind at that moment was on Mr. Pudney, and I thought — although of course — now I remember — But who were you really — oh, yes — it was Bob Clyde, wasn’t it ? ”

“ It was.”

“ Oh. Bob, you know, has been promoted. He is going to South America to take charge of a bank down there all by himself. He hasn’t been very well this spring — sort of run down and overworked. The doctor says he doesn’t get enough exercise and out-of-door air. He is studying Spanish, you see, so as to be ready for this South American enterprise, and that just tied him down day and night. The doctor said he had better spend this summer in the open in order

to get toned up for a tussle with a hot climate —”

“That’s a pretty good one, Andy; well thought out.”

“What do you mean — well thought out?”

“I guess I don’t know what I do mean. I guess I was thinking of something else.”

“You must have been. You are just all off the hooks, aren’t you, Wully?”

“I guess so.” Looking at him squarely now, it almost seemed as if, in place of being tanned from long hours in a boat, Wully was bleached out. Why, he was almost pale as he stood up bareheaded, with the shadows of the apple boughs flickering across his features.

“Do you like Mr. Conway very much?” asked Merry Andrew a little wistfully. She was trying not to be jealous of this new and awesome influence which had so enveloped the McNabs.

“Yes. I like him so much that — I’m going back with him tomorrow — to stay.”

Merry Andrew felt as if a large square of orchard had given way and dropped Wully and herself into a new world; a world of formality, stiffness and strangeness. So that was the answer to the riddle. Wully, himself, was to be a New Yorker. He was already taking on the complacent attitude of one speaking to an inhabitant of “the Provinces.”

“He has some sort of pull with his house” (Wully

was speaking of Conway) "and he is going to spring me on 'em as a sort of a gladsome surprise."

Merry Andrew got up and brushed her dress. She was trying to think of something to say.

"Isn't that nice?" she managed to articulate at last. After all, what did the going of Wully McNab signify; wasn't he always going, and always coming back again? She came very near saying something of the sort aloud, but under this new restraint which had developed between them, thought better of it. Wully seemed to recognize the impulse.

"I think I shall manage to make a stick of it this time; anyhow dad says I'll have to, for he won't welcome me home any more."

"Oh, Wully, he was joking."

"He was in dead earnest, and you can't blame him. He says I ought to be ashamed of myself, when I see what you are doing, Andy. I'm not kidding; I'm in earnest. Dad hasn't any more use for a slacker in the great army of labor than you have; and that isn't much, is it?"

"Why — I think everybody ought to be willing to do his share —"

"That's it — his share. Oh, I'm a slacker, all right. But I guess I shall make a stick of it this time."

"It's going to be awfully — sort of — slow without you around, Wully." Wully gave a dry cackle.

"I'm such a little cutup, you mean to say?"

"Yes, and such a rattling good friend in time of trouble."

"Oh — well, perhaps; when you have condescended to let me know what the trouble was." He held out his hand and Merry Andrew put her own into it.

"On the strength of that, you wouldn't be willing to — give me a good-bye kiss, would you?"

"Perfectly silly!" she scolded and tried to withdraw her hand, but he held it in spite of her.

"Just a minute, Andy. Remember, I'm going for good this time. And I'm not fooling now; I'm in dead earnest. Tell me just this much: Has there ever been a time — before — say — before you came to realize what a no-good I am — well — say, before this summer — when I might have stood a chance with you? When you might, as father says, have been willing to try to make a man of me?"

"Why — why, Wully McNab," cried Merry Andrew, now all in an unhappy tremble, "what are you doing? Not — not making love to me? Not — why, Wully McNab, you've just spoiled everything! All our nice chumminess! All our lovely quarrelsomeness! Oh, dear, dear! why will a boy make such a goose of himself!"

"It is funny, isn't it? Well, forget it, Andy — little Andy — and let us shuck back into the old relation again."

"Yes! Yes, let's! You didn't mean what you said

just now, and I didn't hear it, and everything is as it was before! And besides, you are going away for good this time. I do hope you mean it — I didn't mean that! I —" He was already going.

"Let it stand, Andy; you can't better it. If you got to tinkering with that good-bye, you might make it even worse."

"But you are going to the house to say good-bye to Mother and the rest, aren't you, Wully? They will be awfully hurt if you don't."

"You will do that for me."

"But there's Bob; aren't you —"

"No, you will have to take my farewells to him, too. Tell him that I wish him all the good luck he deserves. He's a whale — is Bob!"

He waved his hand and took a cornrow path towards the road. He had passed the snow apple and the wealthy, and was nearing the Tallman sweets when he turned to her, smiling.

"I took it back, Andy, but only to please you; I meant it just the same." Then he leaped the fence into the road and the dogs stood peering after him in a crestfallen sorrow.

Charley had eaten the tops off three hills of corn before Merry Andrew found herself sufficiently to reprimand him. Presently the muffled sound of horses' feet and the soft rip of turning earth was heard again in the orchard.

CHAPTER XXI

After Wully McNab went away life at the Drew farm fell into what might be designated as a splendid monotony; that is, a monotony of hard work, high thinking, and unexpected successes.

These same successes worked wonders in Grandfather. He shook off invalidism like a cloak, taking a new lease of life from the fact that he was able to do "almost a man's work" once more. Theoretically he was, as of old, at the head of affairs on the Drew place; in reality he had entirely repudiated that responsibility, and was merely a willing lieutenant under his captain's orders. Grandmother disapproved of her husband's attitude in this respect. Nothing irritated her more thoroughly than to hear Grandfather inquire, "Well, Merry Andrew, where you going to put me to work this morning?"

"Surely you ought to know better than Mary Ann where your work is the most needed," she would breathe forth as she handed around the coffee. If Grandfather was foolish enough to abdicate his position of authority in favor of younger leaders, not so Grandmother. She sat as always, at the head of her own table, dispensing its comforts in the "calm of regnant autocracy."

That table was quite crowded nowadays. Not to count occasional extra help — silo-builders, ensilage-cutters, thrashers — every day there sat down the five Drews, Bob Clyde, Mr. Pudney and Evangeline, and, later in the season, Bartholomew Vonvolkenberg, who had appeared again from somewhere over the rim of the world, sobered and disciplined by the cares and expenses of a family and willing to work through the fall for comparatively small wages.

Pudney, with his own farm in a worse state of chaos than usual, paid for his and Evangeline's board by working odd days for the Drews. He may have felt, but never expressed, gratitude to Mother and Sylvia for the mended stockings, patched aprons — even whole new ones and dresses evolved from combinations of outworn Drew clothing which protected the graceless limbs of his youngest child. Perhaps he imagined that Evangeline moulted and grew new clothing, as did the chickens. Evangeline's mother had "gone to live permanently with her daughter, Mrs. Starr," as she herself announced. "Earl was with 'em, and when Phil got settled in the business he had bought out, she would send for Evangeline." She and Dorothy had "got good and plenty through with bein' hayseeds, and she didn't intend that Evangeline should be one either." But for the time being, Evangeline continued to be a hayseed, wearing Merry Andrew's old clothes, taking lessons in music of Sylvia,

and in deportment and manners of Mother and Grandmother, growing fatter, more polite, and presentable every day of her life.

On her birthday, which occurred in October, she was allowed to give a party to which were invited Bengie, Mary and Solomon Franklin, Victoria, Honora and Lily Smith (the latter, the youngest of Sylvia's piano pupils, executed a piano solo with fingers which looked like little kitten's tails); Patrick and Mame Kelley; Anna and Nettie and "Yennie" and "Sharley" Wohoskey; Ray Brown and his sister Aggie, who, being now one of the "big girls," only came to help wait on the young ones.

At church on the Sunday following the party Mrs. Wohoskey accounted for Charley's absence by:

"I yess Sharley he got some poison to your party. He ban seek pooty bad since," at which Merry Andrew whispered to Bob Clyde that she wondered "Sharley" lived to reach home, considering the load he carried.

"I didn't begin to count biscuits on him until I thought he must be near a finish," said Merry Andrew, "then I tallied eight, and realized that he wasn't saving storage-space for dessert. His eyes fairly popped when he saw the cake and floating island coming on. But Sharley is brave if he is little."

During the summer the streetcar began to run.

"Right by our door! Think of it," triumphed Merry Andrew. "We are just the same as in the

city now. What if we had let the farm go and were working in the Bendon glove factory; wouldn't we feel cheap and beaten!"

Merry Andrew made a number of visits to the city by way of streetcar to Bendon and thence by train. The result of these visits, and a hundred dollars of judicious advertising in the city papers, was that in place of selling cream to the local butter factory, she shipped her product to city customers at fancy prices. The Duroc Jerseys were disposed of to breeders of thoroughbred stock. The bitter days were those when the steers went to market, and the mild Holstein bull calf looked his last upon his childhood's pasture.

"But these dark days must come on a farm," sighed Merry Andrew.

If the Sunday was wet, the family went to church on the streetcar; if pleasant, Bob Clyde drove the sober old grays hitched to the farm wagon, he and Grandfather and Pudney squeezed in on the front seat, Grandmother, Mother and Evangeline in the middle seat, the girls and Bartholomew on a board put across the rear end of the wagon.

They had not missed Wully so much in the choir, for Bob Clyde sang in his place. But Bob would be leaving soon, and in the spring Gene McNab was to be married and—"oh, dear!" sighed Merry Andrew, "there will be other changes, and what will become of the poor little church!"

"Now don't worry," soothed Sylvia; "others will bob up to fill vacant places. Every one of the Button boys have good voices, William Anderson is a fine musical bass, and Sanderson Anderson is developing a tenor almost as pure as Wully McNab's. There is Aggie Brown for soprano — why, this singing-class of mine is bringing all kinds of talent to the surface."

"That's right," conceded Merry Andrew, "all kinds; Sharley Wohoskey's kind, for instance. Why, Sylvia, I don't see how your boys who sit next to that steam calliope can hear themselves think, let alone sing. How can he produce such an effect with so little cause to start with!"

"Charley is — is quite intense," giggled Sylvia, "but a singing-school teacher doesn't have perfectly plain sailing any more than a farmer does."

"But it is wonderful what you have done!" admitted Merry Andrew.

"Isn't it?" beamed Sylvia. "Just think of developing time and tune in Pete and Hilda Swanson!"

"I mean in earning the money for the family clothes while Grandfather and I are paying off the debts."

"Trade last! Trade last!" declared Sylvia. "You have given me a compliment, I will return in kind: I heard Mr. McNab tell Grandfather the other day that 'I goom!' he used to feel sorry for him for having nothing but females in his family, but, 'I

gloom!' he had come to realize that 'sons that were no' pushed cud turn oot poor fashless bein's, while grand-daughters which were hustled by caircumstances cud be whupped into won'erful paces!'"

Sylvia paused for Merry Andrew's acceptance of the good word, but Merry Andrew flushed angrily.

"He'd better shut up!" she retorted. "I notice that Wully usually gets around to make good at the last."

"Why, Mary Ann Drew, what an unreasonable girl you are — inconsistent, rather. You were always the first to jump at Wully for his shortcomings!"

"Was I, really?"

"Yes, you were, and you know it."

"Well, Wully is making good now in New York, isn't he?"

"I believe not. His mother told me Sunday that Wully was far from feeling at home in New York. And his father blurted out that Wully would never be contented in any place where there was work."

"I don't blame him," said Merry Andrew. "I'm sick of work myself."

"Merry Andrew," shuddered Sylvia in mock despair, "if you are going back on work we surely are headed for failure. This farm is too big for you to manage. Can't you rent the east forty to Al Pierce and concentrate on the rest?"

"The farm is too small instead of too big. I wish I had three times as much land."

"Oh, Merry Andrew! And work three times as hard as you do now?"

"Deed, I wouldn't work at all then; I would do the bossing and let others do the work."

Merry Andrew was not more than half in earnest, but nevertheless the idea simmered in her brain, during the hard cold days of fall and through the winter.

In November Bob Clyde bade the Drews good-bye and reluctantly went away to his new duties and responsibilities in the South. His going was the beginning of a period of unwonted dullness in the Drew household. They missed his helpful ways, his voice in the nightly readings, his intelligent discussions of what had been read as he stood, lamp in hand, before going to rest at night. Grandfather missed him more than anyone else did — that is, if open acknowledgment is anything to go by. Merry Andrew dutifully tried to rise to Bob's height of interest in the Reconstruction Period; she tried really to become excited over Grant's victories in the West, and to enter with Bob's old zest into the analysis of McClellan's tactics — to sift the testimony pro and con and to decide whether that general was dilatory, or whether his failure was due to the unjust impatience of the people of the North.

In reality she cared but little. McClellan was gone

and the Civil War was of the past, while the battles she was fighting were still in hot and seething progress. But she was winning — oh, she was surely winning. Even through the winter months, thanks to the silage and other items of management about the dairy barn, and despite Bartholomew's wages and board, the weekly deposits continued to go into the Bendon bank. To the world at large it was a bitter and tragic winter; to the Drews in the storm-beaten old stone house it was a period of calm — of dull content. Every Saturday night after Mr. Pudney had gone over to the "other house," and Bartholomew had retired, the Drews held a council of war around the kitchen table to hear "what the cows were doing." Merry Andrew would produce the figures and revel in the delighted ejaculations of Mother and Sylvia. Grandmother (whose turkeys had "died on her" shamefully, and whose predictions of failure had all come to naught) fell back on the argument that it could not have been done without the European war and the consequent high price of foodstuffs. Merry Andrew willingly conceded that these conditions had assured the success of her year and shortened the period of uncertainty.

"But," she would add, "I should have won out just the same if Europe had never heard of war. The secret is to make two blades of grain grow where one grew before, not to be afraid to plunge, within reason, and to keep figuring — always keep figuring! and

hang on to every penny with a regular McNab pinch. That's the way, and the only way, to get the better of a farm mortgage."

In the early spring Pudney formally made over his farm to McNab, auctioned off his household furniture, and came to the Drews' for good. This event had been hastened by the periodical arrival of letters from the recalcitrant Mrs. Pudney hinting strongly of a return to Pudney and hayseedism. Phil had not been altogether successful in his new business owing to a sweeping temperance movement on the part of the cranks of the country; Dorothy was ailing, and she, herself, had been stricken with a belated but overpowering longing to see her husband and "baby Evangeline" once more.

"She's made her bed, now let her lie in it awhile — in fact, she'll have to!" stormed Pudney. "She was so mighty quick on jumpin' out an' takin' up with that blackleg of a Starr! We might 'a' saved the farm if she had done her part. But no, we'd got to buy a buggy and a sewin'-machine, and she an' Dorothy had to dress right up to the scratch. If the styles called for furs that hung down long in front, she got a cold on her chest and had to have a set. When they took to wearin' them there boas, as you call 'em, the cold spot shifted to the back of her neck and she 'a' died if she hadn't got a boa. And whenever the style shifted her cold spot shifted — her's an' Dorothy's. Last winter

they went around, I snakes, lookin' like a couple o' hunters just in from the chase; each had a whole animal, ears, claws an' tails, strapped on to themselves. Dorothy's looked like one o' them collie dogs of your'n spread out to rest. I snakes, it must have drug her all out to carry it around. You know yourself, Mary Ann, she used to go saggin' round under it all last summer when the thermometer stood at ninety in the shade. I says, 'Dorothy, I'm hanged if I wouldn't be afeard of hydrophobia this hot weather!' Them dogs ain't altogether paid for yet, and now that the farm's gone I don't know as they ever will be!"

"Oh, yes, they will be," soothed Merry Andrew, "now that the expense has stopped and you are earning right along. You can begin to pick up your debts—the small ones, at least. And you are perfectly right in letting Mrs. Pudney try the world on her own hook for awhile yet. Styles in furs are likely to change again in the fall; at least I should hope so; they can't change for the worse. Let her buy her own. It will help her to realize how much money can be wasted in dead dogs."

"Yes, Mr. Pudney, it will do her good," acquiesced Mother, and Sylvia and Grandmother and Grandfather all upheld Pudney in his determination to "let 'er go it alone awhile, I snakes! and see how she likes it!"

CHAPTER XXII

On the day that the Drew mortgage was due Merry Andrew and her grandfather appeared at the McNab front door. It was blustery March weather and as they mounted the steps which led up from the road the wind caught Merry Andrew's skirts and twisted them about her slim ankles, took a savage whirl at Grandfather's woolen neckscarf, and another at his faded old cap. Gene had seen them coming and came running to open the door, dragging behind her a trail of lacy wedding finery upon which she had been sewing. Gene was happily busy these days.

She left them in the big warm room, which she had rechristened "the library," and went away to hunt up her father. It took her some time, and during the wait Mrs. McNab came in to insist upon Merry Andrew laying off her coat and hat because Gene kept the place so warm that she would surely be uncomfortable in them.

Merry Andrew complied, and then sat in a sort of shivery dread awaiting the arrival of Mr. McNab. It was her hour of triumph, and yet, somehow, it lacked the zest she had expected it to hold for her.

How could Mrs. McNab sit there chattering with

Grandfather knowing there was no chance of being interrupted by Wully's whistling or joking! Wully was never to call this place home again; old McNab had said it, and this time he meant it. And Gene was going soon — why, how could Mrs. McNab stand it! Oh, these changes! These ever-recurring changes! If you were happy and prosperous, fortified by home, surrounded by your own, the miners and sappers, the irrepressible forces of change were ever at work at the foundations of your fortress. With the knowledge that Wully was already gone forever and that Gene was going soon, the only way that Mrs. McNab could appear so cheerful must be by "carefully not thinking." Merry Andrew had read that phrase in a war correspondent's account of the attitude of the French soldiers. Yes, one could manage to get along by carefully not thinking.

She suppressed a sigh, and fell to dreaming of the coming loneliness of this big house, and of an even more irrevocable loneliness which was bound to shadow the dear old stone house over yonder. The chill of the empty Pudney house swept over her even here in the warm and flower-perfumed atmosphere of the McNab library. Then her eyes, trailing listlessly from the banks of blossoming plants in the conservatory end of the room to the two elderly people talking of the war, the price of sugar, the new church to be built at the Corners, she realized that while her grand-

father had gained in poise and vitality, Mrs. McNab had fallen off. Her hair was whiter, there were tired wrinkles at the corners of her mouth. Merry Andrew experienced a sudden thrust of pity for her; a sister feeling of loss and loneliness.

Gene came towing in McNab, squint of eye and storm-eaten of ear, and Merry Andrew came back with a jerk from the melancholy realm of sentimental regret, and got down to business.

She knew Mr. McNab was going to be surprised; she had fed on the knowledge for months, but how surprised, she had not dreamed.

"You don't mean—" he stammered, "that you hev seventeen hundred and forty-six dollars to pay on your debt?"

"Yes, we do," Merry Andrew assured him, while her grandfather sat back with a complacent and triumphant grin widening his gentle old face.

"Wad yeh mind gevin' a brief account of how yeh did ut?" murmured McNab respectfully.

In giving Mr. McNab the asked-for information Merry Andrew never once said "I"; it was always "we." She often turned to Grandfather for confirmation as to details, and twice she deliberately made believe to have forgotten facts which were fairly burnt into her mind in order to force Grandfather to produce them.

They had sold no crops except the wheat, which

had brought three hundred dollars; the Holstein thoroughbred bull calf had brought fifty, the heifers they had not sold; they were to increase the dairy income of the future. The Duroc Jerseys had brought two hundred and fifty dollars, one colt fifty dollars, poultry products one hundred dollars. The steers — sold at a fancy price, of course, — eight hundred dollars. But the great gain had come from the cream, the year's output having brought two thousand and sixteen dollars. Taken together this made three thousand five hundred and sixty-six dollars.

“ But your expenses, gairl, your expenses? ”

Merry Andrew made a memorandum (she could have given the figures without), Labor five hundred and twenty-five dollars, interest on mortgage one hundred and eighty, thoroughbred cattle, five hundred and twenty-five; one brood sow fifteen, cultivator twenty-five, harness for colts sixty, cream separator one hundred and fifteen, silo two hundred and fifty, and one hundred dollars for advertising the cream in the city and the breeding stock in the country. There had been sundry minor expenses, but there had also been other little matters of profit, — beans, for instance, which had brought unheard-of prices.

McNab gasped. Merry Andrew handed him the check.

“ Now, Mr. McNab, do you care to take our note for the remaining one thousand two hundred and fifty-

four dollars, or shall we hire the money at the bank and take up the entire mortgage? Of course we are much better equipped to handle the remainder of the debt next year than we have been this. That is, in some ways we shall be; in others —" She hesitated a moment and then went on: "We won't have as much interest to pay, nor a silo to build; but neither shall we have as many fat cattle to sell, and we shall have to make over our barn and buy a silage-cutter —"

Old McNab suddenly reached across the shiny surface of the library table and laid a chapped and withered hand upon Merry Andrew's.

"See here!" he murmured. "Yeh ain't a gettin' mar-r-ried r-r-ight away, are yeh?" The blood surged into Merry Andrew's cheeks in a torrent, but she laughed and shook off the old man's grasp.

"I wouldn't marry the heir apparent to the English throne until this mortgage is lifted from the Drew farm!" she assured him.

"'Twill tak a year yet," he reckoned.

"That is what we are figuring on."

"Wheer's the minister's son whose be'n weith yeh this summer?"

Again Merry Andrew's face was dyed an embarrassing crimson as she explained.

"Hum-m-m — ah-h-h!" mused McNab. "Tull be two years at the shortest before —" He seemed to let his thoughts trail off to unknown fields for a time

while he licked his dry old lips and studied the figures in the very tasteful rug on his library floor. Then he came back suddenly and once more reached across the table to Merry Andrew's hand.

"See here," he murmured, ignoring Grandfather as he had through the entire interview. "How wad yeh like to tak this place, and the Pudney place on shaires to work with your own for two years, or until — yeh get married to thet young benker o' yours?"

Merry Andrew started. She bent towards him with parted lips.

"Father!" exclaimed Gene. "Oh, father, I'm just as glad as I can be —"

"Hush up!" commanded the old man testily. Grandfather gave vent to some sort of exclamation, and Merry Andrew turned to Mrs. McNab, who, though struggling with an overwhelming astonishment, seemed not to be averse to her husband's proposition.

"The work is getting too much for him —" she began, but closed her lips at a glance from her master.

"Yeh'd have all the fairm machinery yeh needed; there's a good breaking plow and a silage-cutter, a corn harvester and slawps more; an' in the cawstle doon theer —" he threw a hand in the direction of the garage — "is a wagon yeh're welcome to run to your heart's content. Yeh can get to places very fast in it, as wutness Wully's performances."

"But — what should we do?" interposed Mrs. McNab.

"Go to New York wuth Gene an' luk the wor-r-rl over a bit before we die."

"Oh, father!" Gene made as if to embrace him, but he waved her away:

"Wait tull we hear what Mary Ann has to say before yeh throw ony fits!" he warned. "Mind yeh, Mary Ann, it's to you I make the pr-r-roposition — not to Drew, here, nor to the minister's son, nor to ony of 'em but you!"

"I wonder how Wully will like such an arrangement," murmured Mrs. McNab; and received a squelching glance from her lord.

"Since when has Wully been the master of the place?" he snarled. Mrs. McNab's lips shut tightly, making a sharp line across her face — a danger signal with which old McNab was acquainted.

"Wully has always been fond of his home!" she returned stubbornly.

"Yeh! Fond enough of ut to run for ut to get oot of reesponsibilities elsewheer," sneered the old man, "but never fond enough, I notice, to tak hold as other young men do an' labor a bit to help muntain ut — as Mary Ann, here, has been doing lak a heero for a year back — yes, for all her years back ever since she cam creepin' into the Drew family unwanted an' unwelcome —"

"No more than my sister," broke in Merry Andrew stoutly. "Sylvia has worked harder than I have and been more cheerful about it! I — storm!"

Old McNab glowered at her a moment, then threw back his head and hee-hawed raucously.

"Yeh s-s-torm-m, do yeh? Yeh s-s-torm-m-m! Ah-h-h, yeh minx, I believe ut! I mind one mornin', a year sin, yeh fairly blaw me auld cap off me lugs with yehr s-s-torm-m-in'— eh-h-h, but thet was the high wind that twusted me roond an' faced me your way, else yeh'd not a blawed fifteen hundred dollars oot mah pocket to add to the fifteen yeh had already! Eh-h-h 'twas a big blaw, that! Drew, yeh shud thank yeh're lucky stars that yeh had gairls to your family in place o' boys! I used to peety yeh, but I'm pawst that now."

"What do you say, Grandfather?" asked Merry Andrew, trembling a little in her excitement; "shall we accept Mr. McNab's proposition?"

"Not 'we,' Mary Ann; not 'we,' but 'I'!" broke in McNab. "It's to you I mak the proposition!"

Grandfather's face wrinkled in a slow whimsical smile.

"You must remember that it will be a different matter — accounting to Mr. McNab than what it is checking up with your old gran'pa."

"I know," nodded Merry Andrew with a sudden scornful glance over her shoulder, "but all there will

be to that is, that I shall do my best and Mr. McNab will have to abide by the consequences. And we shall have papers made out — castiron papers — so that each will know what is his due at the end of the deal.”

“Castiron! Castiron!” conceded McNab.

“You and mother could take a little flat right in the city and Wully could be at home with you,” murmured Gene, in fancy forging ahead to the settling of her family in New York. Her mother shook her head at her. The tense look on McNab’s face warned his wife that New York and Wully might better wait until Mary Ann Drew and the farm bargain were settled. Merry Andrew now studied the carpet.

“I wish you’d make it five years instead of two,” she said.

“No,” returned the party of the first part with a stubborn shake of the head, “I’m lettin’ the fairm to you; not to ony shilly-shallyin’ scamp of a husband yeh may pick up!” Merry Andrew flashed a grin at him.

“If you think I haven’t any more horse sense than to marry a shilly-shallyin’ scawmp” (Merry Andrew unconsciously parodied McNab’s pronunciation), “I shouldn’t think you’d dare trust your property in my hands.”

“A lawsie is a lawsie when all’s said an’ done,” replied McNab sententiously, “an’ it’s been the won’er

of my life what some smart women do in the way o' marryin'!"

"Make it three years and I'll close the bargain," said Merry Andrew. "It would take anybody that long to get things right on a big place. Rotation isn't merely putting in different crops year after year; you must take into account the needs of the soil and the best methods of meeting their needs and keeping up the yield."

This sentence was not original with Merry Andrew. She had cribbed it bodily from either last winter's class instruction, or from some farm paper, but it turned the trick. Even Mrs. McNab gasped, Gene was completely overcome and McNab was shaken to his very foundations. Grandfather sat blinking like a benevolent Plymouth Rock hen that had inadvertently hatched out a young owl.

"Mak ut five years," murmured McNab, and Merry Andrew arose triumphant. "Provided," added McNab hastily, "thet yeh remain unmarried."

"I agree to that," promised Merry Andrew. "And now, Mr. McNab, when shall we make out the papers?"

The three Drews who had not accompanied the expedition were deeply affected by the news, each in her own way.

"Why, Merry Andrew, dear, you can never do it," said Mother. "You work too hard on this little

farm; how can you hope to carry on such a great big one?"

"When you have forty acres, you garden; with eighty, you farm it; with four hundred, you manage," said Merry Andrew loftily, and went to put away her Sunday hat which she had worn in deference to the great occasion and in spite of the inclement weather.

"It is literally crowding the McNabs out of the neighborhood," mourned Grandmother when Merry Andrew returned.

"Yep," admitted Merry Andrew, "old Mrs. Simonia Legree is at it again. But what's the difference? The best ones, Gene and Wully, would be gone anyhow. Won't this be great news to write to Bob! News to Bob from Nabob. I'm going to write it myself, Sylvia — you needn't."

"To think," triumphed Sylvia, "of the Drews taking over such a hunk of Rosedale Township!" Merry Andrew stuck her thumbs in imaginary waistcoat armholes and swelled out her chest.

"We have met the enemy and they are our'n!"

"And he was just completely bowled over when you handed out so much money, was he? And just handed his holdings right into your keeping?"

"Yes, he was pretty considerably impressed. He is going to let me have the farm to work until I get married — ain't that a joke, Sylvia? A life lease, you see."

CHAPTER XXIII

After the McNab business was settled satisfactorily to all concerned, Merry Andrew made a contract with Pudney for a year's work at surprisingly liberal wages. Pudney was one of those who, under competent leadership, can do wonders, but who, left to their own devices, walk the straight road to failure. He was conscientious, industrious, and although argumentative and crabbed at times, much more agreeable as a hired man than as a neighbor with domestic problems of his own stinging him like gadflies. His fatherly pride in Evangeline grew day by day until it approached something like awe as he sat evenings listening to his daughter torturing "The Little Flower Girl" to a slow death on Sylvia's piano. His elder daughter had spent many of his hard-earned dollars on piano lessons in the past, but had never advanced beyond the C scale and a jerky rendition of "Redwing." His wife at times made rash and awful combinations of sound on the cabinet organ (gone now in the general wreck), but as Pudney had a discriminating ear, the barn had been his refuge on these occasions. Now that Evangeline was really learning to play, his soul glowed within him.

Evangeline herself was not altogether a party to the scheme. It had been something of a jar in her life when, from doing exactly as she pleased when she pleased, she was, by her mother's desertion, hurled into the Drew household where everybody worked on schedule time; where, after breakfast, she wiped dishes under the kindly but exacting direction of Mother, pieced quilt-blocks and mended her own stockings and calico dresses according to Grandmother's wholesome though old-fashioned ideas of stitchery, practiced her music lesson one hour, no matter who came or what the excitement was, and got off to school well washed, dressed, combed, and strictly on time. Over all her hours of work or play the stormy eyes of Merry Andrew were ever on watch.

Merry Andrew drew her authority straight from paternal source. Pudney had come to believe that a girl who could run a farm, sing alto, crack a joke or a whip with equal felicity, and, more wonderful than all, borrow money from old McNab with which to circumvent his own deep-laid schemes, was one to be emulated by Evangeline or any other person. With all these accomplishments she was an agreeable task-mistress. Pudney had slaved all his days without ever having received a word of praise from those whose praise was due. He had grown bent and crabbed and old before his time. Now he found his industry appreciated, his musical performances applauded, and

after staring financial ruin in the face until he had been outstared, overcome — obliterated, so to speak — he was once more to know what it meant to put money of his own into the bank as a sinking-fund for old age. Under such conditions, in spite of the hard work on the big farm, his back straightened, his temper sweetened, and life held something of sunshine for him yet. He looked forward all through the day's work to the after-supper hour when Merry Andrew or her mother would wade through the Battle of Murfreesboro, stopping to hear his contention that victory belonged to the rebels, or Grandfather's that it belonged to the Yankees. Or there would be an anthem-practice in the parlor, and the fatigues of the day would roll away in surges of rumbling bass; or Sylvia or her mother would play wonderful, intricate music, and he would sit by and watch their slim fingers weave the airy melodies until his jaw dropped forgotten in his astonishment that human fingers could accomplish such miracles.

"I wonder," he muttered one night, "if Evangeline can ever git to do it!"

"Of course she can," promised Merry Andrew largely. "It's all in sticking to practice; and I'm going to see to it that Evangeline practices."

"You bet!" responded Pudney fervently. "You put 'er through, an' if she kicks, let me know an' I'll break her neck!"

Evangeline, overhearing, quailed, and realized that she was in for the strenuous life.

Sometimes Pudney was allowed to put in an entire evening setting forth the "rotten meanness" of the Pierce family to a group of quiescent, unresponsive listeners; Grandmother with her knitting, Mother and Sylvia with the mending basket, Merry Andrew, Evangeline and the dogs fussing and scuffling in the lounge corner over behind the stove, and Grandfather nodding in sleepy silence to the unimpeachable arguments of the long-time offended one. These occasions reminded Pudney of home. Their mutual estimation of the Pierces had been the one point of agreement between himself and his wife.

Without his being aware of it, however, the Drew household connived to jockey him out of this pleasure by substituting some other form of amusement, until there came a time when he could hear the name of Pierce mentioned — even the name of Al Pierce — without frothing at the mouth. Undoubtedly the Drew influence had been good for those members of the Pudney family who had not absconded, no matter what it had been to those who had.

Merry Andrew informed him one day that he was to be delegated as sort of overseer of the McNab place — home, stables, dairy — until she could get a suitable family to move into the house.

"Mr. McNab wanted us to move into his house and

leave our own empty, but none of us was willing to do that," Merry Andrew told him. "But I am bound that they shall find their place in as good order when they come back as when they went way. You know, Mr. Pudney, what boys do to the windows of a vacant house; nothing of that kind must happen to the McNab place."

As soon as Pudney had sufficiently recovered from his surprise at the arrangement he promised that if a single McNab pane were shattered it would be over his prostrate body, or words to that effect.

There followed a period of bustle, excitement and hard work in the McNab neighborhood. Grandmother volunteered to help Mrs. McNab store her best bedding where moth and rust could not corrupt, especially the former. Mrs. McNab had pleaded with her husband to be allowed to take them with her to the city, but McNab, aided and abetted by Gene, refused his consent.

"Yeh'd be wantin' to hang 'em to air across Broadway, I suppose," he suggested. "We'll do naught of the sort! I want to see hoo ut feels not to hev a hoose an' barns an' cattle tuggin' at us from morn to night; the milkin' at six, the feedin' at five, an' the moilin' in betune!"

"He'll get enough of it very soon!" whispered Mrs. McNab with a wink and a nudge in Grandmother's side. "I'll gev him two months to be whimperin' for

home; wonderin' how the crops look; how the heifers are comin' in — I gev him just two months!" with another secret nudge. "He's breakin' his heart this minute for goin', mark my words. He sets great store to his fields and his cows and his mares. The south sheep pasture is the very breath of his body."

"What made him give them up, then?" whispered Grandmother in sympathy. She could not understand this attitude herself. To live in town had long been Grandmother's ambition.

"It's Wully!" hissed Mrs. McNab, her little faded blue eyes snapping among their wrinkles. "Wully wrote his father that he was coming home to Gene's wedding, and coming home to stay. He doesn't like New York." Grandmother made a little moan of commiseration. "His father says the only way to make a man o' Wully is to push him so far out of the nest that he can't flop back again. Poor boy, poor boy! Perhaps his father knows best. The man creature is a strange creature, you will admit, Mrs. Drew."

In obedience to her mentor's suggestion Grandmother gave another noncommittal moan embracing everything masculine.

"Mister McNab says that when young Wully finds no home nest to flop into he will go back to his work in the city and be contented. Lord only knows! Wully's always been full of tricks, but a good dear boy," witnessed his mother. "If we'd had the letter

— I mean — if I had known of the letter before the contract was signed I'd have refused to go a step. If Wully wanted to come home to his ma, he should have come — as he always has! ”

Grandmother not thinking of anything better to say fell back on the always appropriate, “ We all have our trials, Mrs. McNab.”

“ You? ” scoffed Mrs. McNab. “ You don't know the meaning of the word, ‘ trial ’! If you had been married to a contrary Scotchman as many years as I have, and borne children who, in a measure, take after him in wilfulness — ”

“ Wilfulness! ” breathed Grandmother with palms uplifted. And then and there Merry Andrew might have been set forth in all her horridness of disposition, had it not happened that Mr. McNab, who had mislaid his rusty trusty old ear-lapped cap, came storming to look for it into the bedroom where the two women sat.

It was located at last on the floor behind the kitchen stove, but by that time the current of conversation having swirled for ten minutes about the lost cap was directed into an altogether different channel and Merry Andrew did not get her “ needings.”

CHAPTER XXIV

Gene McNab had deliberately plotted to make her wedding the most talked-of event, not only of the McNab district, but of the entire township of Rosedale, including Bendon; and, like her father, Gene did not set her hand to the plough to turn back.

Although an eye familiar with the McNab home might have missed certain embellishments — things belonging to Gene personally, which were packed ready to be taken to her new home, or those which her mother might need in city apartments — the house showed no real signs of having been dismantled. The necessary articles of furniture were still in their accustomed places and the establishment spoke of hospitality from cellar to garret. Odors of caramel frosting and lilacs (it was late May) met and bespoke each other in passing through open windows; the delicious aromas of roasting fowl and of new clover fields mingled in the hall, the one coming in, the other going out.

Gene, who was superstitious, or liked to make believe that she was, felt glad that the day was fair with not even a cloud of the proverbial man's-hand size appearing anywhere in the blue, blue sky. The ceremony was to take place at the church down at the

Corners, but the feasting would be at the house. It was to be the last of the biting extravagances suffered by Wully McNab Senior at the hands of his only daughter, aided and abetted by her mother. All of the McNab district, many of Rosedale, and a small portion of Bendon had been invited.

When Bendon arrived at the church the "district" and Rosedale were already there and the seats filled to the door, so that Bendon was obliged to stand, either just inside, or just outside, the church. Gene's orders had been obeyed to the letter: No ribboned-off seats. If Charley Wohoskey got to the church ahead of Banker Milford and his wife, why, Charley was in better luck than the banker's family, that was all.

And Charley was wary. Banker and Mrs. Milford would, undoubtedly, have other chances to attend splendid weddings; this was like to be Charley's only opportunity and he made the most of it. He wore a red tie and a solemn expression. He had never witnessed a wedding ceremony. He did not know how bad it might be, but by the fuss made over it he imagined something very far from the truth — something more nearly approaching a hanging.

Merry Andrew, hovering in the shadow behind the organ, peered around its corner, caught sight of "Sharley" and tittered nervously. She did not feel like tittering; she felt more like crying out that she was afraid to sing before that little blonde Miss Jenet

Somebody who was to be Gene's bridesmaid; afraid of the man who would be Gene's husband within the hour; and, more than all the others, afraid of Wully McNab, who would be best man and lead in the little blonde Jenet.

He had arrived with Mr. Conway the night before and as yet the Drews had not seen him. Merry Andrew wondered how much the city had changed Wully McNab. A good deal, of course. A Mid-Westerner going to New York always got "smart" very soon — oh, very! They never brought back their r's. Merry Andrew wondered if Wully would call it the "wa'ah." She felt that if he did, she should slap him.

For the life of her, she could not keep the smell of clover blossoms out of her mind, nor the look of Wully that day in the orchard almost a year ago. That was the last time that she had seen him. He had written a few letters to the family, always enclosing a scrawl to be sent to Bob Clyde. They had been funny and nonsensical, of course — just like Wully himself.

Mother, in a white gown and hat, was at the organ. This was to leave Sylvia free to sing. Gene had arranged Rossetti's "The Birthday" as a throbbing contralto solo for Merry Andrew, with a quartette repeating and echoing the refrain. Pudney, the bass, in a new suit purchased for the occasion, looked so rejuvenated and correct, that certain women in the audi-

ence, who were aware of his domestic bereavement, whispered behind their hands wondering if he didn't think of "divorcin' Mrs. Pudney and lookin' round agin." Sanderson Anderson was entrusted with the tenor part of the quartette, and was much weighed down by the responsibility, and by the fact that he occupied the most conspicuous seat in the church, not excepting the minister. He fumbled his music nervously, and wiped the little beads of perspiration from his soft, tan-colored upper lip.

Merry Andrew wished to sing her solo acceptably — with real love and ecstasy in her voice. In order to do so she felt the need of some one person to sing "at." Her gaze swept the congregation. Should it be Pete Swanson, or the minister? William Anderson, or Charley Wohoskey? Or should it be the bridegroom?

The bridegroom, of course. It was he, wasn't it, who had been in Gene's mind when she selected the song and the singer? Merry Andrew wondered if she could sing a throbbing note of love to Harold Conway of New York. At least she could try.

Young Anderson was having trouble with his sheet of manuscript music, Pudney with his necktie; there was a stir in Bendon, just inside and just outside of the front door — the bridal party had arrived.

Mother's fingers swept the keys of the organ — the prelude crept forth. Charley Wohoskey stood up

and turned squarely to face the procession coming slowly up the aisle.

Wully came first with the little blond Miss Jenet Somebody on his arm. How far away he seemed; how handsome; how sophisticated, in his perfectly correct attire; the same that he would have worn if the marriage were taking place in some great metropolitan church instead of in the edifice which had so narrowly missed being his father's hen-house. Yes, he would, undoubtedly, pronounce it "the wa'ah"!

Merry Andrew began her solo. Wully, being taller than the person at whom Merry Andrew had arranged to sing, she found herself singing at him instead. He was solemn, with that rare solemnity which so became him — pacing slowly with the little blonde at his side.

" ' My heart is like an apple-tree

Whose boughs are bent with thick-set fruit —' "

sang Merry Andrew. Wully glanced up and caught her eye. He broke into a broad smile.

" ' Because my love is come to me —' "

went on Merry Andrew, trying to be impersonal, or rather, trying to sing right through Wully and reach the groom, pacing some distance behind with Gene, all in happy shining white, upon his arm.

" ' Because, because my love is come to me! ' "

chanted the quartette.

“ ‘ Raise me a dais of silk and down ;
Hang it with vair and purple dyes — ’ ”

requested Merry Andrew, but of Charley Wohoskey this time, because she dare not sing at Wully any longer. He was making it altogether too personal a matter. If he kept on looking at her like that, she would be smiling back at him and, like enough, spoil the song; “ Sharley ” was safer. He was regarding the bridal group with such intensity that if Merry Andrew had turned her love-song into a cry of fire he would not have heard it.

“ ‘ Because the birthday of my life
Is come ; my love has come to me ! ’ ”

Wully was getting the little blonde anchored and stepping into his own place. The quartette melted into a beautiful and impressive silence as Gene and Mr. Conway bowed before the minister.

Charley Wohoskey had forgotten to sit down. His mother pulled sharply at the tail of his jacket ; he subsided with a clatter of heels against the pew, and the solemn ceremony began.

Under her new lavender bonnet, Mrs. McNab wept softly. No matter how happily, it is a solemn moment when a daughter marries. Gene repeated the vows with sweet seriousness. Even Wully was now serious. Old times were passing away ; old ties giving place to new. Marriage was a dreadful thing,

mused Merry Andrew. Mr. Conway was everything to be desired — good-looking (in a nice dry-goodsy way), kindly, well-to-do in worldly matters — but how could Gene bear to leave her old mother, her brother whom she loved so devotedly — yes, even her crabbed old farmer father, who, after all, had always in the end given her whatsoever she demanded — leave them all and vow to cling to Mr. Conway! Even look happy and triumphant in doing so! Merry Andrew shuddered.

The ceremony over, the choir sang the people out as it had sung them into church. After which Merry Andrew left Mother and Sylvia to ride to the McNabs' while she stole out the back door and hurried across-lots to see if she could be of assistance to Grandmother, who was already there acting as general manager of the troupe of hired servants and caterers.

Merry Andrew even wept a little as she sped through the growing grain, remembering that this spurt of gaiety was virtually the last of the McNabs in Rose-dale. After the wedding feast the Bendon people would go, then the country neighbors, then Gene and her new husband and all of the McNabs. They would take the east-bound express which went through Bendon at four o'clock, and before the chickens went to roost in their sheds that night, would be well on their way to New York, and the great house would stand empty — her responsibility, her care!

She wished that she might avoid the good-byes. She was afraid she might cry. Gene would kiss her and thank her for her singing; old Mr. McNab would warn and advise her, and Wully — would joke. Mrs. McNab would weep, so would Grandmother, and so would Mother and Sylvia. And then — she felt it inevitable now — she should weep louder than any of them, or of all of them put together. She should break forth into a veritable bellow of grief!

She wondered if it would be practicable to run away and hide upstairs somewhere in the attic among the boxes of household things which had been stored up there out of harm's way.

After the dinner she made the effort, but was obliged to give it up. Bendon was on the stairs, Rosedale in the upper hall, both, and all, in a confusing mixture in Gene's room, and in the spare bedroom, and in Wully's bedroom. Undoubtedly there would be stragglers in the attic and in the basement — Merry Andrew crept out and went down to the calf pasture behind the barn. She knew it would be sweet, and cool, and quiet down there.

And it was. And when she rounded the clump of wild plum-trees, there, leaning on the calf-pasture fence, was Wully McNab, still in his wedding togs, with the white wedding favor in his buttonhole.

"Hello, Andy!" he greeted. "Awfully glad you tagged me down here!"

"I didn't!" denied Merry Andrew stoutly. "I supposed you would be up taking leave of folks!"

He came and shook hands.

"Golly! but you're a beauty, Andy! You don't realize what a year has done for you!"

"It has worked me like a slave, for one thing."

"But you've made good, like the little hero that you are. You ought to hear what the old man says about you; he thinks you are the eighth wonder of the world. He expects you are going to pump more money out of the place here for him than he could have pumped for himself while he sees New York."

"I hope I sha'n't disappoint him; and I hope he will enjoy New York."

"I hope he does. I didn't."

"Why, Wully McNab, you're the most changeable creature I ever heard of."

"Think so, Andy? It seems just the other way to me. It seems just as if I am so darned changeless that I can't be happy anywhere except on this old farm! I've beaten back to it over and over again. I fully intended to stay for good this time, but dad put one over on me. You see, I never heard a word about the new arrangements here. Mother and Gene kept it from me as a great surprise; and father so that I wouldn't come winging home prematurely."

"You—you don't think, Wully, that was the reason why your father—"

"I think it was. He is pretty canny — is the old man. 'The best way to keep a bird from flopping back into the nest is to turn the nest upside down.'"

"Oh, dear, dear!" groaned Merry Andrew.

"Present," said Wully.

"Some one is calling you, Wully!"

"Let 'em," said Wully.

"But you must get ready to go."

"Where?"

"Back to New York with your folks."

"I'm not going back."

"What do you mean?"

"What I say, Andy. You know I always mean what I say."

"But your work in New York?"

"Haven't any. I told the boss the night I came away that he might put a man in my place. I spoke quite frankly. I said, 'I'd rather be a doorkeeper in father's pigpen than to eat stalled meats and gulp down therewith the great gouts of servility that one has to gulp in your office,' and then I put my pen in the rack and said good-night. So you see at the present I don't stand any better show of making a living in New York than I do in Bendon or the McNab district."

"I don't see what you are going to do," said Merry Andrew.

"I'm going to work, just as all failures have to — bone labor, you know."

"But you never have."

"No, but it's up to me now."

"Whatever can you do?"

"I can drive a motor car."

"Why, Wully, you are less fitted to drive a motor than any man I know. When you get hold of a wheel you just pack your judgment away under the seat and let go all hold."

"That's 'about the size of it," admitted Wully. "That's one reason I couldn't stand New York; it was just one chronic pinch! And then — I wanted to come home — for this one year anyhow."

"Why for this one year?"

"Well, this year will be about the windup for the old order of things at your house, won't it, Andy?"

Merry Andrew sighed. "I suppose it will."

"Well, I took a fancy to spend this last year here at home — Andy, you hired Bob Clyde once on a time, why not hire me?"

"I can't afford a chauffeur."

"I don't mean as a chauffeur; I mean as a straight out-and-out hired man. You taught Bob Clyde — and there are some things you taught Bob Clyde that I wish you hadn't — one thing that I didn't have to be taught —"

"Hear them, Wully! They are just howling for

you up there — and here comes Sharley Wohoskey on the gallop after us —”

“Hurry, Andy — yes or no — am I hired or fired

“What will you work for?”

“What did you give Bob?”

“Twenty-five dollars a month and board.”

“I’ll work for the same — why, hello, Sharley, old top, how are you?”

“Gosh! Hurry!” ejaculated Charley, his eyes popping. “Old McNab he’s crazy; you’ll be late on de train!” Merry Andrew started impetuously for the house, but Wully grasped her wrist:

“Is it yes, or no?”

“If you hire out to me,” cried Merry Andrew, “I’ll work you like a dog!”

“I want you to; I want to show dad that I can work — if I have to.”

“Well, you’ll have to!”

“Is it a bargain, then?”

“Yes.” Together they fled for the house at top speed, Charley following with long, hare-like leaps.

“What d’yeh mean — keepin’ the cair waitin’ an’ makin’ us late!” roared McNab, Senior, from the back door as his tardy son approached. Over her father’s shoulder peered the anxious face of the bride. She was in her traveling costume.

“Go on — you folks!” called Wully, “I’m not going.”

“Not going!” chorused Wully’s entire family.

“Why, Wully, what do yeh mean?” wailed his mother.

“I’m going to stay here.”

“What’ll yeh do here?” demanded old McNab savagely. Wully made his announcement a little shamefacedly, a little sullenly, but with a very determined manner:

“I’m going to work for Andy.”

CHAPTER XXV

It was certainly an unpleasant hour — that before Gene started on her wedding journey. Her father denounced Wully as a “feckless fool!” and confessed before everybody that his motive in “dhr-r-raggin’ off to the ceety” and giving up the home he had labored so many years to perfect was in order to make it impossible for Wully to loaf there whenever he felt like it.

“Whut’ll he be good for?” he demanded of Merry Andrew. “You’ll be payin’ him wages, an’ he’ll go jumpin’ aroon the counthry in that old car-r-r of ours —”

“Oh, father,” grinned Wully, “never think it. I should be ashamed to be seen in it. You don’t realize, dad, how out of date that old tank is!”

“Wully,” replied Merry Andrew sententiously, “will have no time for tanks, old or new; Wully is going to spread lime.”

“Oh, Wully!” moaned Gene in her disappointment, “you know you never will!”

“You never will!” echoed Wully’s mother with a sob. “Yeh can’t! Yeh haven’t been brought up to such work!”

"I'm going to take lime lessons of Andy," said Wully, returning his mother's despairing good-bye kiss. Merry Andrew saw his lips tremble as he patted his mother's back lovingly.

"Come!" roared McNab from the front walk, and Mrs. McNab jumped.

"Wait a minute, please, Mrs. McNab," said Merry Andrew hurriedly, "I want to talk to you." And in spite of the old man's protestations, she drew Mrs. McNab into the empty dining-room and closed the door.

"But Muster McNab's ashouting!" trembled the little gray woman.

"Let him shout!" returned Merry Andrew superciliously, "there is plenty of time yet if the driver hurries —"

"But there is the trouble; Muster McNab will not ride fast in a motor car."

"I think he will, this time," persisted Merry Andrew, "and I wish to say —"

"Oh, Mary Ann, Mary Ann," cried the older woman, "if yeh tak such a stand, ye'll never get much of a man —"

"I don't want much of a man!" declared Merry Andrew. "At least I don't want a tyrant. If I had wanted that sort I should have set my cap at Philip Starr. I just wanted to say, Mrs. McNab, that you are not to — why — you know — fret about Wully!

That I — ah — am going to — sort of — look out for Wully!”

“My dear gairl-l! I don’t doubt you’ll do your best. But Wully is very head-set. And you really don’t mean to — put Wully to spreading lime, do you, Mary Ann?”

“I do. I’m going to work Wully for all the speed there is in him!”

“He’ll not stay a month.”

“Perhaps not,” owned Merry Andrew dubiously, “but while he does stay, Wully is going to earn his wages!”

“You are very hard, Merry Andrew.”

“I guess I am.”

“Wully’s father was always hard with him, and it didn’t work.”

“Wully’s father was hard by jerks,” replied Merry Andrew; “I’m going to be terribly, evenly hard.”

“Well, let me out, Mary Ann; Muster McNab will be crazy in a short time at this rate!” Merry Andrew released her prisoner and they hastened out to the waiting car, where the final good-byes were said. At Wully’s instigation, Charley Wohoskey heaved an old boot which nearly stunned Mr. Conway, and the wedding party slid out of sight towards Bendon, waving back at the little group on the McNab steps.

“Now that it is all over,” warned Merry Andrew, “we must get down to brass tacks!”

In compliance with Merry Andrew's request (a request for which Sylvia saw no adequate reason), Bob Clyde's name was seldom mentioned; his letters were received almost surreptitiously. Sylvia was even a little hurt by the fact that Wully McNab seemed to have forgotten Bob's very existence.

There was some excuse for Wully, however; he was putting in a strenuous spring. Not until the fields were showing a hint of gold for the approaching harvest was the tension of hard work slackened. Then, suddenly, his exacting little employer changed her tactics. She sent Wully on a jaunt to look after the city end of the cream industry.

"There are things," she observed loftily, "that a man can do much better than a woman." If Wully made a suggestion about a field, or a cow, or a hired hand, Merry Andrew followed it scrupulously. It was remarkable how his interest in farming awakened under this treatment. Wully bought the tractor, and Wully sold the calves, "although this part of farming hurts him as much as it does me," Merry Andrew told Sylvia.

"Funny I never realized how tender-hearted the goose is! Don't you remember the time he threatened to buy one of my dogs so that he could fight Pete Swanson's dog? Wully McNab would thrash a man who would set dogs to fighting on the place!" tri-

umphed Merry Andrew. "Boy and Twoboy have almost entirely deserted me for Wully."

As a farm hand Wully McNab had made good, and now, almost without realizing the change, he had been promoted over the heads of both Grandfather and Pudney to general manager. At least, no important move was made without calling a council of three, Grandfather, Wully, and "the boss," as Wully insisted upon naming Merry Andrew.

Wully hired the new man — the one who confessed his liking for "those molasses, because they're good tasted and nouriaishanin' "— Wully discharged an inefficient one, who stayed out late nights and was discovered sleeping gently in the run, among the wild sunflowers.

The McNab place housed the hired help, the sturdy wife of Bartholomew Vonvolkenberg doing the housework under the supervision of Mother, who made a daily trip to the McNabs' in a cunning little farm cart behind one of the old grays. Merry Andrew had adopted this means of getting from one part of her estate to another. Sometimes, when Mother was too busy, Grandmother took her place, and with complete satisfaction issued orders to the obsequious Mrs. Bartholomew. Together Wully and Merry Andrew looked up the record of the soy bean as a feed product; and together tested different fields for acidity.

"We are really getting too sober," declared Merry Andrew one day. "We must remember that 'As we journey through life, we must live by the way.' When the corn is ready this fall, what's the matter with saving out a lot of nice rustling stooks and having an old-fashioned husking-bee — like those Grandfather tells about; a sort of harvest home festival, with lanterns in the barn, pumpkin pie, and red ears?"

"I can furnish the red ears," suggested Wully, gently fingering one of the sun-burned ornaments at the side of his head. "It's a peach of an idea, Andy!"

"We'll do it, if everything keeps walking right along as it has so far during the season," promised Merry Andrew. "I wish your father could see the crops and stock; I'll bet he'd be pleased."

"He would," assented Wully; "he'd be tickled to death. Especially at my crop of callouses." He turned his palms upward for inspection. "He'd consider 'em almost miraculous. And my ears — getting to look so much like his own — sort of chewed, and chipped off round the edges."

Every week Wully received a small letter addressed in a pinched, old-fashioned hand, and beginning: "My Dear Son:—" Frequently there would be a check in the letter, but often a line at the end would inform him that, "Your father is very close with money these days. He says you have elected to earn

your living your own way and that Gene and I must let you do so."

Once or twice there came from Gene to Merry Andrew a very private appeal for "the truth about Wully." Was he still at work on the farm, and really earning his wages?

And thus the days of summer glided by in a moil of activity on the big farm; in a constant coming and going of the work horses, the cultivators, the lime-spreader, the cream wagon. And everywhere, anywhere, at any time of day, the little cart with a gray horse between the thills and two collie dogs panting and grinning behind.

Evening found Wully at the stone house, reading to Grandfather, joking Sylvia and Mother, petting Grandmother and teasing Merry Andrew, Evangeline, or the dogs.

"No matter what next year does to me, I've had a good summer," he told Merry Andrew one night as they sat together under a waning moon. They were on the step of the back door to the stone house. Wully would be going across-lots to his own rest soon. Down in the run the frogs were trilling; the kitchen light shone strongly along the greensward; Grandmother was setting rolls for tomorrow's breakfast.

"A jolly summer to remember as long as I live."

Merry Andrew did not reply. She sat drooping for-

ward, her elbows on her knees, her chin resting in her palms.

"What's the rip?" inquired Wully; "tired out?"

"No; I'm blue."

"Blue? In the face of that bank deposit yesterday?"

"There are troubles that even bank deposits can't mend."

"Now, Andy, that isn't like you — to get out a hoary old fossil of a remark like that and dust it off. It has been repeated as many as a dozen times since Croesus originated it. Would you mind telling the hired man what's eating you tonight?"

Merry Andrew got up and brushed the dust from her denim skirt with a characteristic little flirt.

"You'd better be hoofing off across the pasture, Wully. Don't let Boy and Twoboy follow you because Grandmother wants them here in the morning to keep the hens out of the garden. The hens play the very mischief with her tomatoes. I'll walk with you as far as the orchard fence."

This was such an unusual condescension on Merry Andrew's part that Wully was correspondingly pleased.

At the orchard fence Merry Andrew did not turn back at once, but stood leaning on the top board, her face upturned to the moon. Wully was dumb; pervaded by a premonition and a fear that something

serious, something irrevocable, was about to be uttered.

"Yes, summer is over," sighed Merry Andrew, "the last really perfectly happy summer I ever expect to know!" Wully said never a word.

Afterwards he told Merry Andrew that when she uttered those words he froze up to the tips of his fingers. He declared stoutly that if at that moment he had attempted to extend a hand in her direction or to have rested it on the fence-top, it would have splintered and lay in fragments at her feet, so completely was he congealed.

Not aware of Wully's icy stare, Merry Andrew awaited some sort of reply, and getting none, went on rather abashed that her dramatic preamble should have had so little effect. Perhaps, after all, she had been mistaken in Wully's attitude toward the Drews, herself especially. She would not be the first girl who had let her imagination lead her far afield from the truth. The sudden conviction of such a possibility made her ashamed. She looked up and laughed — at first; but the tragic expression on Wully's moonlit face sobered her. It was then that she realized something of Wully's frozen condition.

"By the time we pull off our husking-bee I shall have lost Sylvia."

"Sylvia!"

"Sylvia. She will be married before that."

" Sylvia — married —"

" Isn't it horrid! First your sister and then mine. I hate this marrying idea."

" But who —"

" Don't stand there and pretend that you don't know, Wully! Of course Bob Clyde is the best fellow in the world, but I can't seem to be able to forgive him for taking Sylvia so far away — why, forever more, Wully McNab! Stop, I say! I'll slap you! Sic him, Twoboy! "

Wully had thawed out.

Afterwards he confessed to Merry Andrew that when the downpour of that revelation descended upon him, his entire system suffered a flood — an inundation.

" Being so thoroughly and completely frozen," admitted Wully, " frozen up so tight that elephants could have skated all over me and not cracked me in the least; and then being thawed out — that way — all at once — melted — dissolved; not only melted, but turned into boiling steam, is it any wonder that I exploded? Went all to pieces and did what I'd never dared to do before — hugged you within an inch of your life, and kissed you on your mouth and your eyes, and on that nice cuddly little place right under your chin? "

" If it isn't to be Bob Clyde, then it's going to be me, Andy Drew! It's going to be me! I swear it! I'll

work for you, Andy, I'll die for you, Andy, but mine you shall be!"

"Haven't you any better sense than to trot out that old rubber stamp, Wully?" gurgled Merry Andrew, pushing him off with both hands. "It has been said a dozen times since Adam sprung it in the garden that long-gone day!"

"And you cared for me all the time? And that's the reason you gave me a job?"

"No, sir! If anybody had told me this spring that I would take up with Wully McNab, I should have laughed them to scorn, honest! And yet, Wully, you were much better-looking when you were best man at Gene's wedding than you are now. Sunburn isn't so very becoming to you, Wully. Let's keep our engagement a desperate secret until the night of the husking-bee —"

"Oh, pshaw! we can't," said Wully. "Sharley Wohoskey will suspect the first time he catches me kissing you —"

"We can easily arrange that, Mr. McNab!" declared Merry Andrew, "easily; you shall not kiss me again until the night of the husking-bee, and not then, unless in the course of your labors you chance upon a red ear of corn. You must remember, there is going to be lots of time for kissing during an engagement of four years —"

"Four — you don't mean that, Andy?"

"Yes; you remember, don't you, that if I marry I forfeit the lease of the McNab farm? Your father said a lassie was a lassie and not to be trusted. I sneered at him that day, but I guess, after all, he was right."

"You little gipsy!" breathed Wully. "It will, I suppose, take me all of that time to make good."

"Of course it will; for you wouldn't want to marry a wife, as Phil Starr did, before you had a cent to support her with, would you?"

"Old Wully McNab has been called a hard, stingy old Scotchman; but, after this, watch young Wully! Watch him! Thrufty — why, say, I'll sell the tank to begin with; father'll never miss it — he never goes into the garage. Oh, you just watch young Wully skate around after the dough!"

CHAPTER XXVI

Sylvia's wedding, which occurred some little time before the harvest home celebration, was quite a different affair from Gene McNab's. Not even Charley Wohoskey was present; just the Drews, Evangeline and her father, Bob Clyde's mother, and Wully McNab, gathered together quietly in the old stone house, and Bob and Sylvia standing, sweet and serious, before Bob's father to be married. Afterward, stormy sobbing on Merry Andrew's part, quiet weeping on Mother's, and surreptitious sighings and blinkings on Grandfather's and Grandmother's, as the two Mr. Clydes and the two Mrs. Clydes drove away to the train together. And then a gloomy house for weeks. As a matter of fact, the husking-bee furnished a welcome break in Merry Andrew's days of mourning.

It was during those same gloomy days that she came to reply so fully upon Wully's tenderness and care, and that Wully developed a sense of responsibility and seriousness entirely new to him.

Sylvia's going was really the first great sorrow which had come into Merry Andrew's life — this flittering of her chum, mentor, sister, all in one. For days she

could not bear to go into the parlor and gaze at that fatal corner where Sylvia had stood in her soft gray silk with the pink carnations on her bosom. It was almost as terrible as though Sylvia were dead. They might never see her again, and if they did, it would be after the years had worked their will with her, and with them all. She would never be their Sylvia any more; she would be Bob Clyde's Sylvia from now on.

Grandmother reveled in gloomy predictions. She kept track of weather conditions, duly announcing any change for the worse along the Pacific Coast (Bob and Sylvia were going from San Francisco to their destination by boat). She predicted that Sylvia would not be able to stand the climate even if she lived to reach the outlandish place to which her unfortunate young husband was taking her.

Mother, as was her wont, hid her grief and loneliness behind quiet eyes and silent lips. Mother's lot in life had been cast just outside of happiness; on the edge of things. Hers to watch and hers to serve — silently.

So, for a time, Merry Andrew moped about her field tasks, followed by mournful collies who seemed to sense the loss which had befallen the Drew house. Then the laughter came back to her lips and the lilt of her own love song sang in her heart; and before Sylvia's second letter arrived, the waves of everyday-living were already closing over the place she had been

wont to fill. Thus do death and marriage obliterate us!

The day before the husking, when everything had been made ready, Merry Andrew apprehended Charley Wohoskey with a pair of hands ensanguined to a startling degree. The fact that he clasped them behind him while facing her, and became quite round-shouldered in his efforts to conceal them when he turned his back, caused her to seek an explanation.

"Come here, Charley," she commanded. "What has happened to your hands?" Charley's face exhibited a degree of concern approaching despair. "Come here! Let me see your hands. It looks like dye — red dye! It is." Charley assumed a Stonewall Jackson attitude of noncommittal impenetrability. "Charley, tell me what you've been up to!"

"No, Merry Andy — by gosh! Willy McNab he lick me!"

"I know what you have been doing; Wully has set you to dyeing ears of corn red in expectation —"

"No, in de hog-kettle."

"Well, you go and get those ears and bring them here to me; and if you tell Wully McNab a word about what became of them, his licking will be a mere joke to the one I shall give you! Do you get me, Charley?" Thus poor Charley became the buffer state between the ruling powers, suffering accordingly.

Merry Andrew expected a dozen ears; Charley pro-

duced a bushel of ruby-colored corn, each ear carefully encased in its original husk, a little ruffled, a little tampered with, to be sure, but well enough disguised for osculatory purposes.

Charley was immediately cast for first grave-digger; and with his fiery hands and desperate expression of countenance, resembled nothing so much as an under-sized criminal hastily making way with his victim.

"I remember Wully promised to furnish red ears," chuckled Merry Andrew, as she went to catch a glimpse of Pudney coming back. She had sent him with the cart for Mother, who was to cast a last glance over the finished barn decorations in order to make final suggestions.

As Merry Andrew came around the corner of the house Pudney anchored the mare at the hitching-post and came up the walk to meet her. He was alone, and there were evidences in his face and in his gait of a disturbed state of mind.

"What is the matter?" called out Merry Andrew sharply, with a fear for Grandfather leaping into her thought as it was apt to at the slightest provocation.

"She's back! — both of 'em!" announced Pudney. "She's over to your house now; she and Dorothy!"

Merry Andrew knew, of course, that the "she" alluded to was the woman that Pudney had once promised to love and to cherish until death should relieve him.

"Dorothy's with 'er. That dum skunk has lit out an' left 'em to hunt their own corner. She wants me to take 'em back. Your grandfather thinks I ought to take her back. I told him I'd drive over and ask you what you thought about it."

Merry Andrew regarded the man pityingly. "To love and to cherish, in sickness and in health"—and so on, and so on—the words of the marriage ceremony came readily to her mind. Verily, this matrimonial question was a grave matter, not to be entertained lightly.

"Somebody in Bendon told her I was over here at the head of things on the McNab place and livin' in the McNab house. I guess it was that that brung her a-kitin! She says she was homesick to see me and Evangeline. I told her that it wa'n't so; that Wully was here livin' in his own house and that Bartholomew's wife and you folks was runnin' the inside of the house and that all I am is a hired man with not a shingle of a house to call my own. I told her if I took her back that probably you'd fire me and we'd have to go to Bendon to live. She's been workin' in a restaurant—she an' Dorothy, and they're lookin' pretty seedy. I'm switched if I know what to do!" Pudney drew his hand across his mouth and his lips trembled. Merry Andrew was more perplexed than she had been for many a day. Then her brow cleared.

"We'll ask Wully," she said.

While the red-handed one was locating Wully, Merry Andrew made up her mind without any masculine aid whatever. In a dutiful feminine way she was going to ask for advice and take it — if it agreed with her own conclusions. If it did not —

Wully came in response to her summons and heard the case from her lips and from those of the bereaved husband.

“Aw, take her back,” decreed Wully; “give her another chance, Pudney. These women are a trifling lot at best; we men have to exercise a good deal of forbearance to get along with ’em at all.”

“Do you want her back, Mr. Pudney?” demanded Merry Andrew.

“Oh, my Lord, I don’t know!” replied Pudney. “I’ve just begun to git my head above water — got the last debt paid up and a little in the bank. It’ll go now, of course.”

“It sha’n’t!” declared Merry Andrew. “I will go over and have a talk with them. It isn’t fair for them to sit on your shoulders and ride along calmly while you just stagger under the load! It’s no more than fair that they earn their living just as the rest of us have to. I will talk with them. There is plenty of work for them to do in this big bee-hive of ours. If they care to take hold with the rest and work and save, well and good; if not, we won’t take ’em back, and they can, as you say, hunt their own corner!”

Merry Andrew found Mrs. Pudney very humble. There is nothing like the consciousness of a year-old hat and a shabby coat to break the spirit of a woman like Mrs. Pudney. She was wearing the ones in which she had "disappeared."

"You was right, Merry Andrew, about that Phil Starr," she sniffed; "he's a false alarm all right! Meaner'n dirt! He got drunk and licked Dorothy like a sack! He said he believed in a man's bein' master in his own house! Says I, 'I wish now you'd a married Mary Ann Drew when you had the chance, instead of takin' my girl!' Says I, 'I guess you'd a had a time of it tryin' to be master in your own house if you'd got her!'"

Merry Andrew stared, then broke into laughter. She was thinking of what Wully would say when she told him. But Grandmother would not let the matter stand.

"My granddaughter, Mrs. Pudney, would never have married that creature—speak up, Mary Ann, and tell Mrs. Pudney that you would never marry a hired man! Why don't you?"

"Because—Grandmother—I—I might, some day. But not that hired man; not any man, hired or hiring, who for the sake of revenge would burn helpless animals in their stalls."

"He said you wanted to marry him," whimpered Dorothy.

"I was never tempted to marry Phil Starr, but I was tempted to — kill him," sighed Merry Andrew reminiscently, "that night when I caught him firing the bar." .

"I wish you had!" breathed Dorothy, her pale blue eyes snapping vindictively.

"And is my angel baby glad that her mother's back to take care of her?" gushed Mrs. Pudney, reaching for her youngest child to embrace her.

"No, ma'am," responded Evangeline, remembering her manners even in this crisis. Mrs. Pudney cast a resentful glance at Mother.

"I guess they've pretty near spoiled you here," she accused.

"I've took music lessons," Evangeline announced, lapsing slightly in her grammar, "on the voice and on the piano. My father thinks I'm doing real well. I heard him tell Mr. Pierce —"

Mrs. Pudney seemed to feel the solid earth crumbling beneath her feet. Her husband, living in McNab's house, and chumming with Old Man Pierce! There certainly had been changes during the year of her absence.

"Pudney don't seem like the same man he was when I went away," she sighed.

"He isn't," said Merry Andrew. "Mr. Pudney has his debts paid, and has quit struggling, as you may say. His health is good, and although he is working

hard — we all are — he is well and hearty and more or less hopeful. Constant money worries, as you know, will pull the very heart out of a man. Both he and my grandfather are out of debt now, and 'it's up to us to keep them out. Mr. Pudney is under contract to work for me for five years. Now if you and Dorothy care to hire out, I will give you work; you at the McNab place where Mr. Pudney stays, and Dorothy here."

Mrs. Pudney's neck stiffened.

"Do you mean for us to work in your kitchen?"

"Why not? Your husband is working in my fields, where I work with him, and where Wully McNab works, too."

"Wully McNab! You don't mean that Wully McNab is workin'!"

"Wully McNab has worked ever since he left school," retorted Merry Andrew, not attempting to disguise her displeasure at Mrs. Pudney's insinuation. "There are other kinds of hard work besides farm work, I think you've found out, haven't you? Wully worked while he was in New York."

Sensing this quick championship, a bright light dawned for the first time on Grandmother's mind. She saw quite clearly the lay of the land. Merry Andrew, the ungovernable, might, after all, become the chain to bind together the houses of Drew and McNab.

"Well?" Merry Andrew's tone suggested impa-

tience, and Mrs. Pudney at once finished making up her mind.

"There ain't any choice for me an' Dorothy," she sighed. "What about Earl? Can you give Earl a job?"

"I don't think I can," said Merry Andrew and climbed into her cart to go back to McNab's.

The husking-bee was an undoubted success. Those who wished to dance could dance, the center of the barn floor having been kept clear for the purpose with a Bendon orchestra in attendance; those who would make love found the opportunity as they sat on the benches placed half in shadow and half in lantern-light or moonlight about the approaches to the big barn. The husking — the only unreal and theatrical feature of the evening — took place in the open space in front of the barn. The real work of husking corn today is such a matter of machinery there is no romance about it, but the big pile of stooks reserved for this occasion soon melted under the hands of Rose-dale youth. The young men deplored the lack of red ears.

"Something happened to the red ears," owned Wully McNab sheepishly; "I was calculating on quite a crop. Paul planted and Appaulus watered, but our little hopes died —"

"D-y-e-d!" tittered Merry Andrew.

"Oh, Andy!" sighed Wully, dropping upon a pile of husks beside her and pulling a stalk into husking position. "How can you be so — so deceitful — so dishonest, in the matter of those red ears! I've put Sharley to the rack, but he won't tell where they went. He says he'd rather die. He says, 'If I tell, Merry Andy she bite me!'"

"And I should have!" laughed Merry Andrew, "and my bite is deadly." Then she glanced down the path toward the back door of the house and gave a startled exclamation.

"Wully, Wully, for mercy's sake, see who's here!"

Wully's glance followed hers and beheld his father and mother slowly pacing toward the husking group, Grandfather Drew smiling beside them.

Soon after the explanations and greetings were over the festival broke up. It had been hilarious in the extreme with Merry Andrew as hostess and Wully McNab high chief of the fooleries; but with the eye of McNab, Senior, upon it Rosedale waxed nervous, so made its compliments and went home.

"What brought you back, father?" demanded Wully when the Drews and McNabs were alone in the big living-room. His mother answered:

"He was just dyin' of homesickness, Wully, and that is the plain truth!"

"Tut, tut! Such foolishness, woman!" snarled old

McNab, yet with a betraying sheepishness. "Nothing of the sort! Nothing of the sort! I'm fond of the toon!"

"As I was," said Wully, "so fond you hurried right away."

"I — had business!" declared McNab, Senior, with a spurt of his old spirit.

"So did I," said Wully, Junior. "Are we to tell them to-night, Andy? Awh, come on, let's tell 'em now!"

Merry Andrew did not give a verbal consent, but Wully knew that he had permission to tell, and told.

"My dear boy!" exclaimed Mrs. McNab, and kissed both him and Merry Andrew. "This is what brought us home — to see if there was onything of this sort in the wind —"

"Hush up, woman!" commanded McNab, Senior. "Nothing of the sor-r-t," but his wife went on as though he had not spoken.

"We never dr-r-reamed of it until we got the word of Sylvia's marriage, and then —"

"Will you hush, woman?" commanded McNab again. "When is the weddin' to be?"

"Four years from now," answered Merry Andrew.

"Hootin' Smithers! Ut must tak place next week before we go back —"

"Not a bit of it!" said Merry Andrew. "When I marry my lease becomes null and void!"

"But I prefair my son to marry an' settle down!" said Old McNab sternly, and as if that ended the whole matter.

"If you are in such a hurry, perhaps you can arrange with him to take some other girl," suggested Merry Andrew. "There are plenty in the neighborhood who would jump at the chance —"

"I goom, Wully, I'd tak her at her wor-r-r-d!" fumed old McNab.

Wully laughed hilariously and clapped his thigh.

"I'm sentenced to four years of hard courtship. If you can influence the judge, dad, and get my sentence commuted, I'd be tickled to death, but I don't believe you can do it. Through being Andy's neighbor, schoolmate, chum, hired man and sweetheart, I've found out that what she says goes."

"But, man," protested Wully's father, "if yeh start in this way, yeh'll never coom to be maister in your own hoose!"

"Why should I be?" asked Wully imperturbably; "I don't deserve to be."

"Wully and I are not going to be master and slave when we marry," Merry Andrew informed her father-in-law-to-be.

"Not on your life!" corroborated Wully, "but straight partners — fifty-fifty, eh, Andy?"

Merry Andrew nodded, but Grandmother groaned and breathed forth:

"Mr. McNab is right; a man should be master in his own home!"

Nobody laughed outright, but Grandfather swallowed a snort of some kind and fell to coughing.

Merry Andrew threw an indignant glance at her grandmother and went over to Wully.

"If it were left to you, Wully, when would you decide we ought to be married?" Wully consulted his watch.

"Eleven o'clock now. Five minutes to get the tank out of the garage, fifteen minutes from here to Bendon — could even shave that a little in a case like this — twenty minutes for the license and twenty more for Mr. Stroub (he's always slow); why, I think I might safely say — about midnight."

"Well, it hasn't been left to you," laughed Merry Andrew. "But we'll split the difference; we'll be married one year from now, and celebrate with another harvest home dance and invite everybody."

"Muster McNab fairly worships her!" whispered Mrs. McNab to Grandmother. "He's br-r-r-agging about her constantly. When she is really married to Wully —"

"Now listen," demanded Mr. McNab: 'if you wull gev in an' marry my son right away next week — mark now — if yeh wull — I'll gev him a deed to the fairm for a weddin' present!'"

Mrs. McNab could not restrain an exclamation;

Grandmother drew in her breath sharply; but Merry Andrew shook her head.

"One year from now is soon enough," she repeated. "Wully is young and so am I. If Wully gets tired of being my lover for one year he'd very likely get awfully tired of being my husband for fifty."

"Yeh may both be in heaven afore the end of a year!"

"Why, then we'll be sweethearts there," promised Merry Andrew, and Wully kissed her.

"Eh — my days!" groaned old McNab, "but times have changed! An' I'll say as I said afore, there's no accountin' for a lawsie!"

THE END

